

Touching the Essence

Six Lectures on Buddhism

By

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Buddhist Publication Society
Kandy • Sri Lanka

The Wheel Publication No. 132/133/134

SL ISSN 0049—7541

First Edition: 1944 (YMBA, Colombo)

Second Edition: 1969

Third Edition: 1986

First two editions published under the title: *Broadcasts on Buddhism*.

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Digital Transcription Source: BPS Transcription Project

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From the Foreword to the First Edition

The nature of the radio lectures delivered by me was such that a more careful study of them was thought to be useful not only for the many who listened in at the time, but especially for all who were not in the same position.

The lectures, which form a series, touch upon the most essential parts of the Buddha's teaching, the Four Noble Truths, the three characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*, the doctrine of kamma, the paṭicca samuppāda and the deliverance of Nibbāna. The second part of the lecture on Soullessness, being of a more polemic nature, could not be broadcast for obvious reasons, but was delivered at the Y.M.B.A., Colombo, the original publishers of this series, under the caption: "Can the soul-idea be vindicated?"

The many questions that followed this and similar lectures are a proof of the great interest taken in Buddhism by the intellectual classes, if only the Norm is presented to them in a normal way which will satisfy their hunger for truth.

May this publication bring about, if not satisfaction, at least a whetting of their appetite!

Bhikkhu Dhammapāla
Udawatte Temple,
Kandy.
March 15th, 2487 (1944)

The Evolution of Truth

*Aparutā tesam amatassa dvārā
Ye sotavanto pamuñcantu saddhām.*

Open are the doors to the Deathless state;
You that have ears, send forth true faith!

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta

With those solemn words the Buddha declared his intention to preach his noble teaching, “deep as a lake, hard to perceive, difficult to grasp, tranquil, sublime, beyond sophistry, abstruse, comprehensible (only) by the wise” (MN 26).

After having attained that “unsurpassable supreme Enlightenment,” while the Master was seated at the foot of the goatherd’s banyan-tree at Uruvelā, he hesitated wondering whether it would be of any use to make his newly found truth known to the world. For “to mankind devoted to, intent on, and delighting in its attachments it is hard to understand this condition of things, their causal connection, their dependent origination, the cessation of all conditioned things, the rejection of every basis of rebirth, the waste of craving, dispassionateness, cessation, deliverance” (Mv 5).

But then also the thought came to him that there would be beings only slightly covered with the dust of worldliness, who not hearing the Norm would go to ruin, but hearing it might become knowers of the truth.

It was for the sake of those few that the Lord Buddha established at Benares in the Deer park at Isipatana his Teaching supreme, “which cannot be overthrown either by monk or priest, by god or devil, or by anyone in the world” (MN 141).

It is in this first discourse that the Lord Buddha points out that Middle Path which alone can lead to Deliverance by the avoidance of both extremes.

Now, after more than 2,500 years, that same discourse is still applicable, word for word, because only a few have understood and seen, whose ears and eyes were only slightly covered with the dust of ignorance and lust.

The doors to the Deathless are opened wide still for everyone who cares to see.

But also the two extremes are there, more attractive than ever. One extreme is “being intent upon luxurious living in sensuous pleasures, which is despicable, vulgar, ordinary, base, leading to no good.” It is the extreme of materialism, which sees but one origin, matter; and which strives but for one end, material well-being.

The other extreme is “being intent upon self-mortification which is painful, ignoble, leading to no good.” It is the extreme of idealism, which sees but one reality, that of thought; and strives but for one end, the liberation of that thinking “self.”

It was again at the end of the last century that scientific materialism and idealistic monism confronted one another as two independent modes of thought. Theoretically opposed like two extremes, they practically converge both in their starting point and in their goal. “Self” is their beginning and satisfaction is their end.

There is very little difference between the materialists, condemned by the Lord Buddha, the Epicureans of 300 B.C. denying an external agency as the cause of matter and hence concluding

that the highest good was pleasure, and the later materialists like Hobbes, or the Positivists like Comté and Stuart Mill, holding that only the sensuous can be an object of knowledge.

Though cautious thinkers have abandoned the attempt to explain the entire universe in terms of matter and motion—though the frank materialism of Moleschott (1852), relegating all the phenomena of life and mind to the changes of matter, is dead to all appearances—yet this scientific thinking had deep repercussions, the effects of which will long still be felt.

As soon as science became applied, human craving monopolized it for the sake of its own satisfaction. Inventions have been utilized for the increase of comfort. But increase of comfort has only led to desire for still more; and the desire for more has led and will always lead to conflict and conquest. “Over-civilization has brought us to a point where the work of getting food is so strenuous that we lose our appetite for food in the process of getting it” (Lin Yutang).

Life has become unnatural because it has become mechanized; man is reduced to the position of a cogwheel in a machine. Like a cogwheel is moved on and on by other, sometimes smaller, wheels, and thus by turning round and round merely passes on that movement to the next, thus man, to find his place in society must move on with society, and in his whirling round gets hold also of others, whom he drags along with him in the vortex of materialism.

Surely, that is “despicable, vulgar, ordinary, base, leading to no good.”

The other extreme is idealism, which expresses itself in different ways. Yet at bottom they are outgrowths from one root—self.

Fichte in his subjective idealism held that it is the “I” alone who exists; all the rest is a modification of my mind. Schelling and Berkeley tell us in their objective idealism that all, including the “I,” are mere manifestations of the Absolute. Finally Hegel informs us in his absolute idealism that only the relation between subject and object is real.

Has all this anything to do with the extreme against which the Buddha warned us when showing his Middle Path?

Addiction to self-mortification is merely the practical side of the speculation of idealism. In idealism the “self” is sublimated, with the natural consequence that the “self” must be liberated from matter; soul must be delivered from the bonds of the body. The passions of the body must be subdued even by force; body becomes the eternal enemy of the spirit which can only be overcome “by prayer and fasting” (Mt. 17: 21).

This kind of idealism will easily lead to pretension, simulation, deceit, hypocrisy; it is much more dangerous than materialism; for materialism may make a man bad and that is the end of it; but idealism will sublimate the evil and call it good; egoism becomes an eternal soul; killing becomes justice; nations are suppressed for the sake of freedom, and God in heaven is thanked for a victory here on earth.

Thus idealism becomes fanaticism. Surely, that is “painful, ignoble, leading to no good.” Between the two, not as a meeting-place, not as a compromise of the two extremes of materialistic self-indulgence and idealistic self-denial but “avoiding both” the Blessed One has found the Middle Path, a path not of mediocrity, but of the highest truth and attainment, “giving knowledge and wisdom,” not in the wavering of speculation, not in the excitement of discussion, but “in tranquillity of mind and penetrative insight, leading to Enlightenment and Deliverance,” enlightenment with regard to the real nature of things, deliverance from all suffering and its cause.

Thus the Noble Eightfold Path, though a path of earnest striving, unremitting endeavour, and perseverance till the end, can only be entered upon by right understanding of the Truth.

With this we arrive again at the old question, which remained unanswered 1900 years ago: “What is truth?” (John 18:38).

Truth is usually defined as the correspondence between the intellect and the object. The intellect, however, being the *act* of understanding, can increase. But increase and growth involve change. Thus even truth is subject to change. This is called *subjective* truth.

Of a purely *objective* truth we can know nothing, because any experience of it would make it subjective. Truth, therefore, is not something existing in itself, but is a mental experience. Now, that experience will not be the same in all.

No one expects a child of four to have the same religious notions as a college-student; and an adult’s experience will be quite different again. There is growth in truth, and for that very reason it *cannot* be *proved*, but only be experienced. Proved can only be that which is static, has the nature of an entity.

Therefore, to understand that truth is a process, that truth is actuality, that is Right Understanding.

And what is actual? That all component things are sorrow-fraught. This is the First Noble Truth.

Birth is called Suffering, because becoming itself is the manifestation of the aggregates, the condition sine qua non of all misery, and also the evil result of past dissatisfaction.

Decay is called suffering as the dwindling of vitality.

Death is called suffering as the dissolution of the aggregates.

Thus the arising as well as the passing away of the aggregates is a source of woe, the first as potential, the later as actual.

Sorrow is called suffering which results from loss of relations, wealth, health, virtue or right understanding.

Lamentation is the suffering that finds expression in weeping and crying.

Pain is the suffering of bodily discomfort.

Grief is the suffering of mental disagreement.

Despair is the suffering of worry and mental unrest.

“To be associated with things one dislikes, to be separated from things one likes, not to get what one wishes—that also is suffering.”

This together with the last two, viz. grief and despair represent the mental characteristic of suffering.

Finally and summarily “the five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupadānakkhandhā*) are suffering,” by which in one word are indicated the root and cause of all suffering, namely clinging (*upādāna*).

This is the Second Noble Truth:

The source of all suffering is attachment, craving, clinging.

This craving takes one of three forms: craving for sense-pleasures, craving for permanent existence or eternalism, craving for no more existence or annihilationism.

The truth of this statement will at once become clear when it is considered (and this is the Third Noble Truth) that with the utter cessation of craving also suffering will come to an end.

For, he who has no desires is always content. Contentment cannot be obtained in any other way, for desires are "unsatisfiable", likened unto a bare bone with which a dog cannot still its hunger, decaying flesh which is poisonous, a torch of straw borne against the wind which thus burns the hand of the bearer, borrowed goods which cannot be kept in possession.

Is it pessimism to consider pleasures as suffering? No, it is actuality! But to consider the satisfaction of the senses as real pleasure—that is sheer folly. In order to cure that folly, the fact of suffering is raised to the rank of a noble truth; for folly can only be cured by wisdom.

This shows again how Buddhist ethics or moral principles, like everything else in Buddhism, are based on a foundation quite different from morality in other religions.

Mental development is exactly what is needed for the development of morality. For, "when religion ceases to be wisdom, it becomes superstition overlaid with reasoning" (George Santayana).

In other religions good conduct is enough to become a saint: "If you have love, you have perfected the law," said St. Paul to the Ephesians.

According to later reformers like Luther, faith alone is enough for salvation.

But in Buddhism real virtue is impossible, without the foundation of reason. The truth must both be experienced and understood.

To experience suffering surely can be done by any being endowed with feeling; that, however, does not prevent a possible return. Understanding therefore is necessary of the real nature of the evil and of its cause. When properly understood suffering will be seen as an effect of action which must have been evil to produce such a bad effect. When thus understood in connection with action, it becomes living like actuality itself. No longer passive fate but active "kamma," which means self-responsibility.

Action is not finished with action and it is just that which makes life so terribly actual.

At every moment I am reaping the fruit of the past; at every moment I am sowing the seed for the future.

Is there then no escape possible, no salvation? There is! And the escape lies along the Noble Eightfold Path of which Right Understanding is the first step. Like knowledge of a disease is the chance for a cure, thus understanding the cause-and-action of suffering is the beginning of Deliverance.

This understanding should be accompanied by the right intention. It should express itself in word and deed, in practical daily life, in perseverance and in mind control.

Thus should suffering be comprehended, the cause of suffering eradicated, the cessation of suffering realized and the path leading to the cessation of suffering developed. For, the knowledge of the truths must be translated into function, if ever the task will be accomplished.

This is the Noble Path that avoids the two extremes of materialism under all its disguises and of idealism with all its false decorations.

It is the Path of Actuality that leads to Reality. Only having realized this Path with knowledge and insight, the deliverance of mind is steadfast, the last life is reached, rebirth no more waits.

And how did the five monks to whom this first sermon was preached receive it? What was their reaction? "All received it with joy."

Yet, only of one it is said that his eyes opened to the truth; and he reflected: "Whatsoever is of the nature of arising that is also subject to cessation."

No rapt enthusiasm, no utterance of admiration, but the deep tranquillity of a lake without ripple, reflecting the pure light of the sun.

Cessation—that is it where the Path leads to Cessation, not of being, for there is no permanent soul to cease, but cessation of *arising* (*bhava-nirodha* = *Nibbāna*). Thus cessation is not a doctrine of rationalized suicide, not of annihilation, and hence it does not lead to asceticism. Only in one sense does the Buddha admit to be an annihilationist, namely in so far as he teaches the annihilation of the passions, of evil inclinations, of craving.

To reach this sublime state of perfection there is only one way, the way of renunciation. To renounce is to give up, to let go, to abandon, to discard. And its object is all that has the appearance of being. To be is an affirmation of self, of permanency. Hence all morality which strives to perpetuate self or soul is a subtle kind of selfishness, hence immorality. And the more subtle and sublimated, rationalized and idealized it is, the more dangerous and the more difficult also to escape from it.

Here no rectification of thought will suffice, but only the stilling of thought. No argument can solve this problem; for the more words we use, the greater the chances for misunderstanding. Only one thing is to be done: just ceasing.

And in ceasing we will cease. In letting go we shall arrive. In giving up we shall obtain. For, that which we abandon is the burden of sorrow; that which we discard is the fetter of self. And thus renunciation becomes freedom, relief, deliverance, a foretaste of Nirvāna.

This doctrine of cessation, so characteristic in the Buddha's teaching, is the natural outcome of his discovery that all our suffering is due to our own craving. If craving is suffering, then renunciation must be happiness.

In the renunciation of self the clouds of ignorance clear up, for in the light of non-self (*anattā*) things are seen in their true impermanent nature. In the renunciation of self all distinction between self and others disappears and love becomes truly universal. In the renunciation of self all fear becomes impossible, for fear is the child of delusion and attachment. "When pleasures vanish of their own accord they end in keen anguish for the mind; but when relinquished by one's own will they produce infinite happiness proceeding from tranquility" (*Vairāgya Sataka*).

While leading his ascetic life Prince Siddhartha had to leave his five companions to find enlightenment all by himself. Only after having purified himself from this attachment he was able to attain what he had sought up to now in vain. Perfect in renunciation, pure in detachment, with insight in truth, he could return to his former companions without running risks of being defiled by their ignorance and craving, "unaffected by good and bad alike, even as a lotus fair to water gives no lodgement" (Sn 6).

Thus also the mind has to detach itself from the five senses of the body. Purified in detachment, enlightened by the truth, the mind can give guidance to the impressions in the five senses, and thus lead experience up to full realization.

Then all feelings and perceptions will be conceived as impermanent, then they will lead to dispassion (*virāga*), to cessation of craving (*taṇhā-nirodha*). Thus forsaking them one will cling to nothing in the world, and without worry one will attain Deliverance for oneself. Then one will know: "Destroyed is the possibility of rebirth, led is the holy life, done is what had to be done, nothing more for this life."

Then truly it may be said: "Oh death! Where is thy sting? Oh grave, where is thy victory?" Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. xv 55). Not because this corruptible shall have put on incorruptibility, not because this

mortal shall have put on immortality, but because no death can sadden, where no more birth occurs.

Thus set the Master rolling the Wheel of Righteousness “excellent in the beginning through its foundation on morality, excellent in the middle through its development of calm and insight, excellent in the end through its termination in Nibbāna” (Vism II 7–2).

Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo, sandiṭṭhiko, akāliko, ehipassiko, opanayiko, paccattaṃ veditabbo viññūhī.

“Well-proclaimed is the Teaching of the Blessed One to be realized in this life, yielding fruit immediately, inviting investigation, leading up to Nibbāna, to be attained to by the wise, each one for himself.”

*Seyyathāpi bho Gotamo nikkujjitaṃ vā ukkujjeyya,
paṭicchannaṃ vā vivareyya,
mūlhasa vā maggaṃ ācikkheyya,
andhakāre vā telapajjotaṃ dhāreyya
cakkhumanto rūpāni dakkhinti*

As one with might
could set aright
what had been overturned,
As one has shown
what was unknown,
(what still had to be learned)
To men astray
he told the way,
(to truth he gave the key;)
Into the night
he brought a light,
so that all men could see.

Like these waves of sound spread and roll on and contact you all, may thus the thoughts of loving-kindness which permeated these words reach you too and set vibrating in your hearts and minds similar thoughts, so that there may be peace even in war, love amidst hate, freedom from lust in a world of craving, freedom from suffering in an ocean of misery!

May all living beings be happy!

Soullessness

“Netam mama, nesoham asmi, na meso attā”

“This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.”
(Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta [Mv I 6, 38-47])

There are some great primary questions that lie at the bottom of every religious system and which form the seed of religious development, upon the answer to which, depends the nature of any religious philosophy. These questions have been puzzling mankind from time immemorial and they will be troubling him for ever more to come, because, though the answers to those weighty questions have been as numerous as there are different religions, they have been unable to satisfy the thinking mind.

The reason for the ‘unsatisfactoriness’ of all these answers—and we may safely predict that any future trial to find a new solution to those problems will be equally unsuccessful—lies in the fact of the intrinsic impossibility to formulate an answer. Any answer is beside the point because those “weighty” questions are based upon misunderstanding. All of them begin to assume the existence of the very thing they want to prove; in other words they beg the question, or in more philosophical terminology they are guilty of the sophism called *“petitio principii.”*

Some of those questions are: Whence am I? Whither do I go? How do I know myself? What happens to me after death? How came I (or life) into this world? How does this world enter into me, into my consciousness? Is the soul the same as the body or not?

These and similar questions are sometimes said to be of vital importance, but then only to those who choose to enquire into them, like children will make a vital problem of the discovery, that a round peg does not go into a square hole. But a person with reason and insight will see at once that it does not fit. Not the peg or the hole, but the child is wrong here. So also not the play of world-events, but only those who put such questions are to blame.

It will be seen that there should be one question prior to all those enquiries, upon which depends the very possibility of further questioning, namely: Is there anything at all which deserves the designation of “I”?

The method followed by the Buddha in solving this question is the most scientific. He does not base his doctrine on logic, for by doing so one ought to presuppose the reality of the thinking subject as standing outside the process of thinking, as a witness or rather as a judge.

That which is not logic in reasoning will be either illogical or a-logical.

Illogical is that which is contrary to logic. Such is faith, belief, acceptance on the authority of someone else without being able even to ascertain the existence of such an authority.

Logic in reasoning, as is said, cannot solve the difficulty, because it presupposes that which it is out to prove; hence it becomes a sophism: *petitio principii*.

Only one kind of logic can help here, the logic of events; only this kind of logic is beyond sophistry and on this a-logical basis the Buddha has grounded his teaching of “soullessness.”

The logic of events, of facts, the doctrine of actuality can be understood not by argumentation but by actual analysis.

Whatever we know of the body is known in its parts and in its entirety as subject to change. Within seven years even the smallest particle has been replaced. Composed of the four

elementary qualities of extension, cohesion, caloricity and vibration, the ultimate insubstantiality of all so-called solid matter is evident.

The relative qualities of hardness and softness, the occupation in and of space, are due to the elementary duality of extension (*paṭhavi*). It is the element of cohesion (*āpo*) which makes the many parts adhere intrinsically and to one another, and thus prevents an aimless scattering about or disintegration, thus giving rise to the idea of a “body.” Caloricity (*tejo*) depends on vibration (*vāyo*) for by increased vibration the temperature rises and when the temperature is lowered, the vibration too is reduced in speed so that gases liquefy, and liquids solidify.

Matter being thus reduced to mere qualities and forces which are in a constant state of flux, there certainly no permanent entity can be discerned.

Is not there, however, present a something which supports the qualities, which is the possessor of the attributes, which as a substance stands under them all, upholds them all and unites all phenomena?

Dimensions, form, place, colour, action, even material might change, yet is not there a something which remains unaltered?

A table may be round or square, have three or four legs, have any colour and be made of wood or iron—yet for all that, it remains a table. Is there then not a something independent from the phenomena?

Independent from all attributes there is naught, no substance, no substratum, no entity, not even the idea or concept! For it is impossible even to think of an object without any qualities. The qualities together form the object. The qualities, the phenomena may change, but then the object also changes.

A carpenter can make a round table from a square one, still it remains a table. But that is not the entity that has persisted, but only the idea thereof, namely the concept of an object suitable to lay out meals, to keep smaller articles on, to do writing work, to play games, etc. Yet that idea is dependent on certain conditions, e.g. a flat top; for if *that* would be removed even the *idea* of table cannot remain connected with the remainder. Substance therefore is a mere concept, has no existence except in a worldling’s imagination. When science bends more and more to the opinion that all so-called solid matter is merely a form of energy, advocated by scientific materialism or as some prefer to call it, *Energism*, that is only admitting in different words the ultimate insubstantiality of all so-called solid matter.

The view that matter or the body is the real self, or ego-entity must lead to the doctrine of annihilationism (*uccheda-ditṭhi*), the perishing of that “self” at the disintegration of the body.

The view of the persistence of a self after the breaking up of the body (*sassata-ditṭhi*) will therefore find another more permanent seat for that self, namely the mind.

The biologist Haeckel and the chemist Ostwald were the real pioneers of this modern revolt against traditional metaphysics. Yet in the anattā-doctrine of the Buddha a substance-like entity either in matter or mind, underlying and supporting the phenomena was most categorically denied twenty-five centuries ago.

Yet matter shows more permanency than thought. If thus the body cannot be held to be a permanent entity, still less so can the mind be said to be an everlasting soul or self.

“Better were it, O monks,” said the Lord Buddha (S II 94), “that the untrained average man should conceive this body composed of the four primary elementary qualities as soul, rather than the mind. And why? The body is seen to persist for a year or two ... for a generation or

even for a hundred years ... while that which is called consciousness, that is mind, that is intelligence, arises as one thing, ceases as another, both by night and by day."

Feelings (*vedanā*) are of three kinds, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Now feeling is mental, for if contact is not mentally perceived, no concept of feeling will be formed. Can this mental action of sensation be said to be the self? Or is (*saññā*) the perception of this sensation the self? But then if a pleasant sensation makes place for an unpleasant feeling one would have to admit that the "self" has changed.

There is, however, an experience which gives the impression that there is something which remains the same even though sensations, impressions, perceptions, concepts change. That remaining, unchanging entity is called the soul. Now it is clearly not our duty to disprove any statement which is made without sufficient ground. On him who puts the thesis rests also the burden of the proof. Otherwise: "*quod gratis asseritur, gratis negatur*"—"What is gratuitously asserted, may be gratuitously rejected."

A so-called direct proof for the existence of a soul as a permanent entity to be distinguished from changing modes of action is the firm conviction that, though thoughts and actions change, yet the thinker and the doer remain the same.

In refutation it must be said that often the most firm and universal conviction cannot prove a fact. For, conviction is feeling, sentiment, emotion, but proof requires reason. The general conviction of many centuries that this earth was the centre of the universe, even the ecclesiastical condemnation of Copernican astronomy, for upholding which Galileo had to undergo dire penalties and Giordano Bruno was burnt at the stake, could never change the fact that this earth is a minor planet turning round the sun which is only a star not of the first brilliancy. Conviction is no proof.

But even if we let this pass for argument's sake, we cannot admit that the thinker and doer remain the same, for it is exactly by thoughts that we change our mind, by actions that we change our habits.

If that change does not always come all of a sudden and for that reason is less conspicuous, yet the change is not less real for that. Actions cannot be separated from the doer, cannot exist purely as such. There cannot be *walking* without a body that walks. If therefore the action changes, the so-called actor must change at the same instant. Thus the "I" is identified with the action. It is only that "I," which can walk, and sit, and think, and eat, and sleep. But that "I" is not a permanent, unchanging entity; it is identified with the action, is the action itself, and thus changes with the action. "I" cannot stay at home, while "I" go out for a walk.

It is the conventional language which has spoilt the purity of conception, though in some cases even the language has remained pure enough, as e.g. in the intransitive form of impersonal verbs; e.g. it rains. Who rains? What rains? Simply: *it* rains, meaning rain rains. Likewise the concept should not be: I think, but thought thinks.

The fact that conventional language uses the terms "I" and "mine" may be advanced in support of the human conviction; but that does not make that conviction any truer than our way of speaking of sunrise and sunset.

The individual, conventionally called "I" or "self," is a mass of physical and psychical elements without a soul behind them, without a soul inherent in them, the elements themselves being a mere flux (*santāna*), a continuity of changes without identity.

The Sāṅkhyas too believed in constant change, but a change of the same substratum, eternal matter.

The assemblage of impermanent elements, however, does not require a permanent entity to keep them together. The very presence of an unchanging substance would prevent any change in the phenomena dependent on it.

In postulating a mythical, permanent, unchanging entity, as the possessor of changing qualities, one merely assumes that the existence of which had to be proved. A single moment of existence *has* no qualities, but it *is* those qualities.

Matter does not *have* extension, cohesion, temperature, vibration, but it merely *is* all that, and without that it is not. Mind, likewise, is not an entity, but a function, consciousness is thought, and it arises when certain conditions are present: the object, the sense-organ, the proper attention. Thus a thought arises not as the action of a thinking subject, but conditioned by, originating from, dependent on other states. And as such it will be again the condition to, the origin of, the *raison d'être* of further states—in ceasing passing on its movement, thus giving the impulse to new arising.

“Mind arises from a cause; and without assignable conditions consciousness does not come about” (MN 8). Then the Lord Buddha further explains in the *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta*, that consciousness is conditioned by the objects, i.e. thought arises in dependence on objects presented to the sense organs. If the object is a visible shape and is presented to the eye, then dependent on those conditions, a thought may arise which is called in this case eye-consciousness, as fire derives its name, wood-fire, grass-fire, from the fuel applied.

Without fuel, however, no fire, without objects and organs, no thought can arise. Becoming is according to the stimulus (lit. food) and when that stimulus ceases, that which has become also ceases.

“Void is this of self, or aught of the nature soul.” (MN 43, Mahā Vedalla Sutta)

The teaching of anattā does not proclaim that there is no individuality, no self, but only that there is no permanent individuality, no unchanging self.

Personality or individuality is according to Buddhism not an entity, but a process of arising and passing away, a process of nutrition, a process of combustion, a process of grasping.

This individuality has no permanent existence, as a wave in the ocean is only existent as a process, and in rolling on makes itself, and destroys itself.

Yet the individuality of consciousness, though not a permanent entity or soul, is neither a merely physical process. It is a process of grasping. Like fire can only burn as long as it lays hold of new fuel, thus the process of individuality is a constant arising, an ever-renewed laying hold of the objects of its craving, a process of grasping.

It is craving which causes the friction between sense-objects and sense-organs; and from that friction leaps up the flame of new “kamma” which in ignorance will not be extinguished, but in grasping lays hold of fresh material thus keeping alive the process of burning.

“All is a burning, O monks! The eye is burning, form is burning, eye consciousness is burning, eye-contact is burning. And whatever feeling arises dependent on that contact, that also is burning, burning with the fire of lust, the fire of hate, the fire of delusion” (Mahā Vagga, 1 20.2).

As long as that fire is kept aflame, there will be the delusion of “self,” there will be the craving to perpetuate that individual self, so that it becomes a something rather than a function, an entity rather than a condition, a soul which sharply separates man from the animals, which have no souls worth saving.

Thus in the ultimate sense this deluded affirmation of self as a permanent soul, is craving which says: "This is mine" (*etaṃ mama*); it is pride which says: "This am I" (*eso ahaṃ asmi*); it is the erroneous view which says: "This is my soul" (*meso attā*).

The error is rooted in craving and pride—craving for happiness and bliss, pride which cannot acknowledge defeat. Where the wrong view of an everlasting soul is thus connected with craving for permanency and bliss, there the teaching of soullessness must necessarily follow from the teaching that all things are impermanent and unsatisfactory.

If there were in this body a soul, if feeling or perception, mental differentiations or consciousness were the real self, then the body would not be subject to ill, the mind would not be subject to distress; for if they were the real self, they would be in a position to order: "Let this be so, let this not be so!" If then the body and the mind are impermanent and for that reason sorrow fraught, one is not justified in thinking: "This is mine; this am I; this is my soul!"

Few there are in the world who identify this perishable body with a permanent entity or soul. On the other hand there are many who maintain that the mind or one of its functions, like sensation, perception, mental differentiations or consciousness are identical with an individual, permanent soul, or that those functions possess such a soul-entity, or that they contain in their action such a permanent self, or, finally, that they are contained by or in a soul.

There are many who even now try to prove the existence of a soul. It is maintained by them that the changing mind and character are supported by an unchanging soul. This supposed soul escapes all observation, even though there may be some awareness of thought and action. A direct proof of this existence of a permanent soul is universally admitted to be impossible; it cannot be known directly in itself. What, however, cannot be known directly in itself, might be known sometimes indirectly from its working. If an effect can be observed, we may legitimately conclude to the existence of a cause. And the nature of the effect proves to some extent the nature of the cause. There is no need to put one's finger in the fire to find out whether the fire is hot. One can readily conclude to the heat of the fire, if the temperature of the water increases, while being placed over the fire.

Similarly, a permanent soul, if it would be existent, must produce effects according to its nature. Now a being in order to be permanent, as the soul is supposed to be, cannot be material, because matter is composed, and what is composed is also decomposable, that is impermanent. Hence the permanent soul should be immaterial. This is fully admitted even by the strongest adherers to the soul theory. Indeed they claim the soul to be spiritual.

But if the soul is immaterial, its working must be immaterial also, and its existence and functioning should be independent from matter.

Around this turns the whole argument in favour of or in disproof of the existence of a soul. This independence from matter is attempted to be proved in various ways. We shall consider and refute them one by one.

The first alleged proof is taken from *external evidence*, namely the opinion of all men. If all people agree upon one point, it is said to be the voice of nature, which cannot err. It is said that all people at all times were convinced of a continued existence after death. Now this argument loses its very foundation, because not all men believe in a soul. One sixth of the world's population is Buddhist and denies the existence and the very idea of a soul; further there are millions of atheists and scientific men who have lost all faith in God, soul and religion, who have turned completely materialists, who, even if some of them accept the existence of a substance underlying the phenomena, will consider this to be of a purely material substance dependent on, and perishing together with, the co-existing form; further still, even the majority of the so-called believers are so only in name, for they contradict their faith by their deeds

whenever they commit a mortal sin, thus condemning their souls to eternal damnation for the sake of a short-lived satisfaction, which they certainly never would do, if they really believed in an eternal soul.

Thus there remains only a very small minority who really and actually believe in their soul. And they can certainly not claim to echo the voice of nature. For their conviction is not even a natural growth of mental development, but rather a remnant of the childish submission in their youth to the dogmatic interpretation by ecclesiastical authorities. This kind of blind faith, which, enforced upon the child, remains sometimes a habit in uneducated adults, is in reality the crudest form of religion, hardly to be distinguished in degree from the superstitious practices of primitive tribes.

But, moreover, what is this voice of nature? It is nothing else but the collection of individual opinions, as a nation is the collection of persons, born and living in the same country. If one individual can err, so can two or three, or a thousand, or a million, and even all.

The fact of general opinion, even of the whole human race, should never be overestimated. In the past we have seen how the strongest convictions have finally crumbled so that they now seem ridiculous to us.

Yet in their days people have made even the sacrifice of their lives for convictions, generally disbelieved then, but now equally generally accepted; which is only another way or saying that general opinion has changed.

Only 400 years ago the mass of civilized humanity laboured under the delusion that the sun goes daily round the earth; that this earth forms the centre of the universe. Copernicus stood practically alone opposing not only what was then said to be common sense, but also divine revelation and the authority of the Bible. Galileo was jailed and by threat of torture compelled to disavow his former opinions, because his telescope contradicted the Bible. Because Giordano Bruno dared to draw some inferences from the Copernican theory contrary to the Scholastic Philosophy of the church based on Aristotle, he was excommunicated and handed over to the secular authorities with a recommendation of a "punishment as merciful as possible and without shedding of blood," the atrocious formula for burning alive. He perished in the flames, turning his eyes away from the crucifix that was held up to him, the victim of theological stupidity and self-applauding intolerance—the martyr for freedom of thought.

It was and still is the common daily testimony of the sense of sight of every being that the sun does move round the earth. And yet, that sense of sight, that common sense, that general opinion, that divine revelation, that biblical authority, were clearly mistaken and false.

The same happens even nowadays and might happen ever and ever again. What was only yesterday proved by science and tested in practice, is overthrown today by some newer theories equally proved and tested and universally accepted ... till tomorrow some more advanced theories are brought forward, explaining the same facts quite differently, but more logically and more according to the truth.

Does truth change? If by truth is meant (as it is defined in philosophy) the harmony between consciousness and the known object, then truth will change with any increase or decrease of knowledge; then there will be degrees of truth, of objective truth in which the object becomes better known, or of subjective truth in which knowledge becomes clearer. If truth, on the other hand, is taken in itself, it must be said to have no existence at all; for if an object is not related to any knowing mind, in which would then exist its truth?

Moreover, we usually call a thing true, if it corresponds with the idea we have formed of it; but our ideas themselves, according to which we judge the truth of things, are formed from impressions of those selfsame objects.

Thus it will be seen that a general or even universal agreement of opinion is no sign of proof of the truth.

To say then that the voice of nature, if there would be any such thing, cannot err is neither induction, i.e., a conclusion from individual experience to a general truth or principle, nor deduction, i.e., an application of a universal characteristic to individual cases. It is merely bad logic based on sentiment rather than on reason.

In this way we have disposed of external evidence in favour of the soul-idea in two ways, namely in so far as we have shown that the existence of a soul is not the universal opinion, and even if it were so, it would prove nothing.

It may be true that all people at all times believe in existence after death; even we Buddhists accept this doctrine; but existence after death does not involve a *permanent* existence after death, nor the existence of a permanent soul. Even the Hindus, who believe in transmigration of soul as opposed to the soulless rebirth in Buddhism, do not really believe in individual, permanent souls; for according to *Vedānta* the soul after transmigration through many lives in *samsāra* will be re-united, re-absorbed in Brahman from where it was emanated in the beginning of its wandering. There its individual existence will have come to an end.

External evidence thus having failed, we come to a whole series of arguments alleged to be proofs from *internal evidence*.

Internal evidence means evidence that manifests itself not directly in its existence, but only indirectly through the manifestation of action. Thus, e.g. when a car-tyre goes flat we may safely conclude that there must be a hole somewhere in the tube, even if we cannot discern it with the eye. For, if there were no hole, the air could not have escaped.

Similarly from the working of the intellect we may draw some conclusions with regard to the nature of the intellect.

Everything is received according to the nature of the receiver. Water, e.g., takes the shape of the glass tumbler in which it is contained. Colours can only be perceived by the sense organ of sight; sound only by the ear etc.

Now the mind is said to have *universal* or *general* ideas. Though John Locke, the English philosopher of the 17th century, in his doctrine of ideas, maintained that universal ideas stand for individual objects that are real in the context of experience, this would be a proof for the materiality of universals rather than for anything else. There will be, however, very few supporters of the soul-theory if any, to support this opinion, for, if universal ideas stand for individual objects, they would cease to be universal. And that is exactly our point of view. Berkeley, though a Bishop of the Church of England, and an Idealist in the fullest sense, thought rightly that all ideas are particular; things or objects as presented are individual; they are given together with the relations, each of which may be described by concrete reference to the presented object or event. There is no such thing as shape apart from objects possessing shape, nor colour apart from things having colour, or any idea of motion except as bodies moving (*Principles of Human Knowledge*). The idea of a triangle is dependent on the knowledge of various types of triangle. The idea of colour has no reality, cannot be thought of except as red, or blue, or white, etc. Universality has no meaning apart from the relationship of particulars. An idea is general only in so far as it stands for particulars of the same kind. We speak about humanity. It is true this idea maintains even though individuals die and are born, even though after a

hundred years the whole human race has been renewed. But still the idea is only possible as a collective noun through knowledge of individuals. Thus the idea is based on, and derived from, material experience and therefore cannot be said to be immaterial. A proof that the so-called universal or general ideas are based on a material foundation can be obtained from the fact that, if the material experience is insufficient or wrong, the so-called general ideas will suffer from the same deficiency. The first Europeans e.g. who landed in Africa created a panic by their mere appearance, because they were not considered to be human beings. Clearly the idea of a particular colour had crept into the idea of a human. Only when experience grows, ideas become enlarged, so that the most general or universal idea is dependent on the largest amount of individual, particular experience which is always material

If therefore universal ideas do not contain anything immaterial, the intellect itself cannot be said to be immaterial. Thus even if there would be a soul, we might conclude from its material action that it too would be material. But material is composed; hence it is also decomposable or impermanent.

A second refutation can be drawn up from the major premise that everything is received according to the nature of the receiver. Now it is beyond doubt and everyone will have to admit it for himself, that the mind has many times very material and materialistic ideas, thoughts of lust and hate, of profit and comfort.

Those thoughts must come from a material source. Now, if the soul is said to be that source, then it is a very material soul, indeed; decomposable also, because material, and hence impermanent, and no soul at all.

Another argument from internal evidence to prove the existence of an immaterial, permanent soul is taken from the fact that the mind seems to have *immaterial concepts* like unity, truth, virtue, justice. Those concepts, however, are not truly immaterial, as they have been derived from material experience. The idea of unity arose only when, after counting for a long time with beads or beans, we were able to substitute units for those objects. Unity is nothing but uniformity from a certain point of view, while the differences are intentionally overlooked. Even unity and order in nature, on which science has built its laws and axioms, have no real existence, but are based on experiment and observation, hence thoroughly material, and can be overturned by new observation and experiment.

Even thousand scientific experiments do not definitely prove a fact, and make it a law, but one single experiment can upset the law and prove its invalidity.

As physical phenomena do not follow an absolutely rigorous necessity, but permit a contingency, incalculable like chance, so the mind does not follow any fixed law. Though conditioned and influenced, its choice cannot be predicted; thus the alleged perfect regularity, uniformity, necessity of things is a mental fiction, a proof of the possibility of mental aberration in its lack in actuality rather than of immateriality.

Likewise truth, virtue, justice etc. are only ideas resulting from associating different experiences; they are dependent on education, and that is not even a sign of reason, still less of immateriality. For even a dog can learn to do many things and finally come to "understand" that putting up his right paw means a piece of cake. Education, which is nothing but mental training, brings ideas together; and once they are associated, the point of connection might become hidden in the subconscious mind. The real connection being forgotten or suppressed, the mind will try to establish an artificial link, which is called rationalization. If ideas like virtue and justice were really immaterial and permanent they ought to remain the same and unaltered in different times and climes. But the association of ideas depends on acquired learning and cannot be therefore an inherent natural action of a permanent soul. Thus a Christian who keeps

two wives is guilty of bigamy and considered as very immoral. But a Muslim can be very virtuous in the legal possession of many more than two. That morality changes is a truism. Not so very long ago slavery was deemed right, encouraged by the State, sanctioned by the church, but that way of thinking has given place to a morality which judges slavery to be wrong, because it assigns higher values to human personality. A few hundred years ago any father had the absolute right of life and death over his own children; nowadays we have laws even for the prevention of cruelty against animals. The moral laws which prevail here in *Kāmaloka*, do not hold good in *Brahmaloka*. Thus these few examples show that abstract ideas like virtue, justice, and morality are very much impermanent and can therefore not be the expressions of a permanent soul.

But then, the mind can conceive *essential* ideas, it is said, expressing the intrinsic nature of things, such as definitions comprising the common genus and the specifying difference. These are said to be unchangeable and can therefore only be conceived by an unchangeable, permanent entity or soul. Definitions are said to originate from Socrates, while Plato built up a system of eternal ideas. But definitions have as little reality about them as a mathematical problem. They may be useful or even necessary for logical distinctions, but they cannot be said to be either permanent or impermanent, because they are mere mental fiction.

Definitions, essential ideas, so-called eternal principles are all based on material experience and exist only in particulars. It is the very nature of essence to be particularized. It is true that we try to separate the idea of man from this or that individual. But at once we find it impossible for the essential idea to exist separately, and equally impossible to unite it with the individual, as we do not see any relation. This unnatural and illogical position arises from the mistake that we tried to separate the two: essence only exists in particulars. Thus they are not unchangeable in this sense that the objects to which they refer and on which they depend, are changeable and impermanent. The particulars are material; so are therefore definitions and essences, abstractions and universals.

The last arrow on the bow of internal evidence from the intellectual powers is the *reflex idea*. In reflection thought becomes the object of thought. And here certainly, say the upholders of the soul-idea, is nothing material. According to Buddhism the mind is classed as a sense, the internal sense, and thus we have two sources of ideas: sensations which have come through the external sense-doors, eye for sight, ear for sound, nose for odour, tongue for taste and the whole body for touch—and sensations furnished by the mind of its own operations, reflections. Thus reflection is the knowledge of perceived sensations. When sensations are material and are perceived in material sense organs, how then can the knowledge thereof become at once immaterial? Reflex ideas are also experienced in animals; they too show to have memory, attachment, and revenge. Yet nobody will maintain that animals have an immortal soul, for never yet has a dog been baptized to save his soul from eternal damnation. But if animals can have reflections without a permanent soul, why should a soul be postulated in the case of humans?

There is separate from the intellect another power in man which is the subject of much controversy, and that is the will.

The supporters of the soul-theory try to make the working of the powers of the will dependent on the soul they imagine, and like for the intellectual powers they claim the will-power to be immaterial, because it strives, they say, not only after material and particular good things, but for the absolute good. This is not true, because the absolute good cannot be known; would it be known, it would cease to be absolute and become relative. What cannot be known cannot be desired or willed for, and such a general object cannot have any attractive power. No man can love the most beautiful woman in the world without knowing her, though this is still

rather material. One always strives for some particular good which is always material. “‘Immaterial objects’ do not exist”; this is a mere phrase containing a contradiction in terms.

It is maintained, however, that some will-objects are unchangeable, e.g. it is always good to respect one’s parents. But if that respect would include even obedience with regard to evil, it would no longer be good, and thus no fitting will-object.

Whatever is good or bad is only so with respect to its good or bad effect. “*Kamma*” is only “*kusala*” if there is a “*kusala vipāka*.” And as the effect or the result is always particular, a concrete instance, the action and volition must be of the same kind.

From this follows a last objection, namely the freedom of the will. In inorganic matter we see an absolutely rigid determinism towards a certain end, but in similar circumstances man remains free and master over his actions, which clearly show his superiority over and independence from matter. Thus if the will is free, that is independent, it must be immaterial and then also permanent.

The discussion on the freedom of will is usually opened from the wrong perspective. For, whether one accepts the freedom of the will or rejects its independence, in both cases the will is taken as an entity, as something existent, be it free or be it bound.

Will, however, can neither be said to be free, nor bound, because it is non-existent. It merely arises whenever there is the possibility of a choice. If there is nothing to choose from, there can be no question of willing. On the other hand, the possibility of choosing shows the presence of two opposites or more. The possibility to choose what is evil shows that the action is conditioned and influenced, and therefore not free.

Even if one chooses to do what one *knows* to be harmful to oneself there will still be some motives that brought about that choice. E.g. knowing that association with certain people will bring one to excessive drinking and gambling and other actions that bring about financial difficulties, deterioration of health, and the ruin of family-happiness, yet one might seek that company because one lacks the moral strength to break with them.

To show one’s courage, to imagine one’s independence, are sufficient subconscious motives to influence and determine one’s choice against the better dictates of reason and common sense. Even one’s pride might not allow one to go back on a previous decision, even if it is perceived as harmful.

If there were no attraction, no inducement, no motive, equilibrium would have been established already and no choice would take place.

Thus volition arises only when a choice becomes possible. If there is a choice possible, there will be attraction and repulsion that influence the choice and make it not free. If there is no choice, then, of course, there is no will at all, but determinism and no freedom whatever. When we, therefore, must admit that this inducement and coercion is never absent, we must also conclude that will is never free.

As we can only strive for one end which we see and understand as best according to our limited capacities, so we can only choose those means which seem to us the best under given circumstances. The reasons that induce us to choose a certain means may differ in different people according to their understanding; but, though the line we follow may differ, we all follow the line of least resistance.

To speak about “free will” contains really a contradiction, which is carefully avoided in our Buddhist psychology. For “free will” would indicate the existence of a will prior to, and independent from, a choice, while “will,” which is but another and milder word for “craving,”

does not exist separately, but only arises in dependence on contact and feeling: “*phassa paccayā vedanā—vedanā paccayā taṇhā*.” Where contact and feeling cease; no craving can arise.

This teaching is not the same as the Psychological Determinism of Leibniz and Herbart, in so far that the doctrine of kamma is not fatalism. Kamma is volition (*cetanā*) said the Lord Buddha; but volition itself is based on consciousness that is continually arising and passing. It is this consciousness fettered by craving which is ignorance; but freed from the fetters (*saṃyojana*) and defilements (*kilesa*) it is Deliverance or Nibbāna. Freed from craving there is pure insight, and no more volition, no more kamma. Thus our real freedom lies not in the will, but to be without will.

Thus we have then disposed of all the so-called proofs in favour of a permanent soul.

Some Western scholars in Oriental languages, though not scholars in the teachings expressed therein, yet venture to offer their criticism on this most essential point in the Dhamma. They will explain “no-self” as “self” in the following way: When the Buddha speaking of the components of the aggregates of clinging (*pañcupadānakkhandhā*) said of each separately: “that does not belong to me; that am I not; that is not my self,” what else could he mean but that the self or soul exists separate from them? To which we answer: Had the Buddha stated simply and directly that there is no permanent ego-entity, he would have given the impression of siding with the Annihilationists against the Eternalists. Well, both schools of thought were wrong and the Buddha wanted to show to both their wrong. Therefore, without saying that life comes to a complete end at death, which is the teaching of Annihilationism, he merely analyzed the so-called being and whatever he found of matter or of mind, he did not find a soul there.

Could he have taught us the doctrine of no-self (*anattā*) more explicitly and more impressively?

Whatever there be, “that does not belong to me; that am I not; that is not my self” (*netam mama, nesohaṃ asmi, na meso attā*).

Personality was described by the Bhikkhunī Vajirā as a bundle of aggregates, thus a stream of successive states without abiding entity.

There is then no sound basis for the assertion that the soul is distinct from the body or mind. If, therefore, one maintains that the soul is immortal, one must equally predicate that body and mind are immortal, which is clearly absurd.

Human soul cannot be distinct from human life, and human life collapses together with the body, just like animal life and body.

What remains? The influence of good or bad deeds, which will cause another life on the same basis of good or bad.

There is no soul, there is no self, no permanent “I” or ego-entity. But there is a flux, a process of life, of action and reaction, which rises and falls like the waves of the ocean. Those waves will come to rest, that process will come to a stop, when all desires are stilled, because “I” is an expression of selfishness, of craving. When craving has gone, no “I” will be left.

If the teaching of the Lord Buddha is rightly said to be beyond sophistry (*atakkāvacara*) it is never *more* so than with regard to the teaching of soullessness (*anattā*). For, any reasoning, even the purest logic, will presuppose the ego in thinking, as Descartes did: “I think therefore I am—*Cogito ergo sum*.”

“Soullessness” cannot be proved with reason, as darkness cannot be seen by bringing in a light. Darkness can be experienced only when all light is quenched. Likewise “soullessness” can only be realized when all selfishness is excluded. When the craving of “mine” and the pride of “I” have vanished, then also the error of self (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) cannot arise.

But when there is no more thought of self, disgust will be felt, leading to dispassion on the Path of Sainthood; and this detachment will produce the sweet Fruit of Emancipation with the knowledge of attainment that “the possibility of rebirth is extirpated, lived is the holy life, done is what had to be done, beyond this there is none.”

The load of life laid low,
The precious price is paid;
The waves of well and woe
of stormy stream are stayed.
The direst duty's done,
A tenfold tiger tamed;
The weary war is won,
The timeless term obtained.

It is significant that after hearing the first discourse of the Buddha only one of the five disciples understood and even he could only *enter* the Path to Holiness. A fuller explanation of the Truth was necessary. But after hearing this second discourse, the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, all five attained the highest perfection of *Arahatship*.

“Soullessness” is indeed a *lakkhaṇa*, a distinguishing mark, the essential characteristic of the Truth. For with self all morality is immorality, but without self good and bad alike are transcended in the pure deliverance of heart and mind, in the freedom from all attachment or lust, from all aversion or hate, from all ignorance or delusion.

May the understanding of soullessness grow in us through the practice of unselfishness!

“May we come unto this darkness which is beyond the light of mere reason; may we without seeing and without knowing, see and know that which is above vision and knowledge, through the realization that by not seeing and by not knowing we attain true vision and knowledge” (Dionysius, the Areopagite). May in the realization of non-self all beings be happy!

Joy and Sorrow

Dukkhañc'eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodham

One thing only do I teach:

Woe and how its end to reach. (MN 22, Alagaddūpamasutta)

In this saying the Lord Buddha has summed up the whole of his noble teaching, laid down its essential features, and indicated the line of thought and action, which we, his disciples, ought to follow, if we too wish to attain what so many have attained before us, and what all of us are striving for, Buddhists and non-Buddhists, knowingly or unknowingly—the attainment of the highest and purest bliss.

The very fact that we all are striving for greater happiness shows that the degree of happiness in our possession is not satisfactory, that that degree of happiness is not even considered as good. We do not strive for what is better, but for the best. The best, however, is not better than the good, but it is the good that we have recognized as such. And after having recognized it, all the rest cannot even compete; it becomes simply evil, and as such it is rejected, whatever other name we may give to it.

Because the good is not attained, the quest of the good involves striving, struggle. Hence it is that even the vaguest idea of happiness contains an element of no-more-struggle, no-more-striving, attainment, equilibrium, rest. It is the eternal rest we all are seeking.

“The night keeps hidden in its gloom the search for light;
The storm still seeks its end in peace, with all its might.”

(Rabindranath Tagore)

Rest is the natural goal of all action; and all action, because it is non-attainment, is dissatisfactory: dukkha. As life is action, actuality, non-attainment, striving, it is also impermanent. Hence life is sorrow-fraught, because it is impermanent.

To see that there is suffering in the world is not such an extraordinary discovery. The greatness of the Buddha's insight, however, lies in the fact that he realized that *everything* is suffering; in other words he saw not merely that there was suffering in life, but he realized that life itself is suffering.

Thus suffering is actuality and as such it forms the foundation of the Buddha's teaching. This does not make Buddhism pessimistic. It has merely to be accepted as a fact, as the truth, as actuality. There is nothing to be unhappy about the fact of dukkha, but there is something to be learned from that fact. Indeed, the whole of Buddhism is dependent on it. Here in suffering lies the origin of Buddhism, and in the deliverance from suffering its culmination.

Even if Buddhism would teach the universal fact of suffering without showing at the same time the deliverance thereof, still it could not be said to be pessimistic; it would be stating the truth without exaggeration. But pessimism is an exaggeration towards the dark side. It would be pessimistic to state that no deliverance from, no cessation of suffering were possible. But the Buddha said: “As there is in the mighty ocean but one taste, the taste of salt, thus there is in my teaching but one taste, the taste of Deliverance” (Udāna).

So stands Buddhism marked, not as a pessimistic religion, a religion of sorrow and sadness, but as leading to the purest happiness and joy, because it teaches the deliverance from sorrow.

But in order to be delivered from sorrow, we must first understand what sorrow is.

Like the idea of happiness is linked up with eternal rest, so the idea of unhappiness is based on restless change. It is the teaching of change, of transience, of impermanence: *anicca*, which makes us understand all as suffering: *dukkha*.

To see the world as a continual flux, to see its dynamic nature, its perpetual impermanence, should not seem to be so very difficult to people who are used to discriminate. Yet most of those who even scientifically accept universal impermanence make a double exception, thereby breaking down their own logic. First of all there are those who are firmly convinced of the impermanent nature of all things, but who maintain at the same time an underlying substance that unchangingly supports the ever-changing phenomena. Secondly there are those who place themselves outside the field of observation, thus imagining to judge the phenomena objectively, as if they were the only fixed point in this raging ocean of change.

No, there is no exception to the law of nature that all component things are transient: *sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*.

But why should suffering always be the result of impermanence? Not all separation is bound up with sorrow.

The rays of the setting sun part with the landscape, clouds are dispersed by the blowing wind, yet there is no suffering. Only that separation, only that transience, which is experienced through the delusion of self, is experienced as sorrow. But when there is no "self," when soullessness, "anattā," is not only known but also realized, then there will still be transience, but no more sorrow. And transience too will be no more when all component things are decomposed.

Sorrow thus depends on transience, and on the misconception of "self." As long as "self" is not understood as a misconception, as a delusion, as an act of ignorance, so long also impermanency will not be understood as suffering. Here nothing can be learned by argument. Here nothing can help, but to pass, over and over again, through the crucible of suffering and thus to learn by experience. This is the meaning of *saṃsāra*. It is our egoism that makes us suffer, and suffer direly all the more, because we suffer in ignorance.

The fact of suffering is admitted by all, but it is not by all understood in the same way.

There are some, (like the Hindus) who do not see sorrow as real, but as an illusion; it is an illusion indeed to see sorrow as an illusion, not as real. There are others, (like the Christians,) who admit the widespread fact of sorrow in human life, but they consider it as a divine favour: "Blessed are the sorrowful." It is the sickly effect of an over-worked imagination.

There are others again, (like the Moslems) who do not see much evil in the world at all and submit to it fatalistically. It is contrary to actuality.

But in Buddhism sorrow is not accepted as a blessing in disguise, but as an evil to get rid of; sorrow is not an illusion, but real enough, though it is dependent on ignorance; sorrow is not to be submitted to, but to be overcome. And Buddhism alone teaches how to overcome in a final victory which needs not to be fought again, because it teaches how to uproot the evil and cut down the root by the overcoming of craving, through which alone an escape from "self," from sorrow and transience is possible. If the breadth and the depth of a religion may be measured by the keenness of its analysis of evil and by the appropriateness of the salvation that it offers, then certainly the prize should go to Buddhism. For, when sorrow is identical with life, the only solution lies in no-more-rebirth. But rebirth and all the evil resulting therefrom will occur as long as there is the will to live.

Thus that will to live, that desire to be, that lust to enjoy, that craving to possess, that clinging to keep, has to be rooted out so that it will not grow again.

“Through not understanding the Noble Truths of Suffering, its origin, its cessation and the way to its cessation, we have been wandering in this beginningless saṃsāra, both you and I,” said Lord Buddha (Parinibbāna Sutta).

It is ignorance that leads to rebirth, i.e., to sorrow; thus it is in knowledge that the great problem of life and death must be solved. To understand that decay, disease, death, sorrow, lamentation, grief, woe and despair are unsatisfactory does not require much understanding indeed. But to understand that birth is suffering, it is necessary to know that birth is not only the physical process in which a living being appears in this world, but also the mental conception that is followed by craving. It is the birth of the defilements (*kilesajāti*): greed, hate, delusion, pride, false belief, scepticism, sloth, agitation, unscrupulousness and recklessness of consequences. It is the birth of actions (*kammajāti*) that will give rise to effects (*vipākajāti*). Understood in this way, any existence is evil, for it is arisen from craving and offers fresh fuel for ever-renewed craving. But to understand that life itself with all its beauty and joy is suffering, one must have tasted and understood the impermanency of life. Experience and understanding both are necessary. For if transience is only experienced, it might well become a new source of fresh delight which keeps away the boredom and the tedium of constant and unchanging beauty and joy. Is not the sea made beautiful by the rise and fall of her waves? Do not the different seasons add to the attraction of nature? Does not a change of food add to better appetite, a change of climate to better health?

But the fact that our craving ever wants a new supply of new delights must lead to disappointment, because the supply is not always at our command. Not to understand this is ignorance of the first Noble Truth of the universality of sorrow. To miss this point is to miss the whole of Buddhism. No introduction, no argument can be of any use. He who finds happiness in suffering, who is satisfied with what he has, will never seek beyond. The understanding, the realization of sorrow, of life as sorrow, is a growth of insight. No fruits can be expected of a seedling; growth is necessary and development, till at the proper season from the fading blossom of transience, will ripen the fruit of understanding.

What matters it, if that fruit be bitter in taste, as long as it cures the chronic disease of craving? Sorrow, if recognized as a by-product of “self,” may become the means, may open the road to Deliverance, as the proper diagnosis of an illness is the first step, the chance for a cure.

But the sorrow, the suffering, on which the Lord Buddha based his doctrine of actuality and deliverance, is more than pain-laden affections. The five aggregates of clinging (*pañcupadānakkhandhā*), the psycho-physical composition of mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) itself is said to be sorrow. Thus suffering is both bodily and mental; it is the imperfection inherent in life, whatever form that life may take.

A certain amount of happiness may fill the emptiness within to some extent, but that craving, like an abysmal emptiness, will never be fulfilled. Before the cup is full to the brim, it has sprung a leak at the bottom. Hence that constant thirst resulting from that fleeting happiness. When the object of craving is within reach for a moment, that craving becomes clinging (*taṇhā-paccayā upādāna*); but clinging is impossible because all is impermanent (*anicca*).

Even if one finds some little happiness through satisfying one’s desire, does this mean that complete satisfaction will give complete happiness? Because a thirsty man gets satisfaction in drinking water, everlasting bliss is not found in being drowned.

It is the want that makes one strive for satisfaction, but if that satisfaction is obtained, the need for it is no longer felt, and it is not wanted any more.

Even the satisfaction bears in itself the seed of fear and discontent, fear owing to its uncertainty, discontent over its impermanence, which is even hidden in the folds of smiling lips, while it leaves one afterwards emptier than ever before.

The satisfaction of a want is not a final satisfaction; it seems only to create a new want instead.

Modern civilization has made much progress and given to man many comforts. But those very comforts have only made life more complicated; easier communications have made the problems and quarrels of families those of nations. It is like an attempt to reach the horizon; the harder one strives, the greater is the disappointment for not getting nearer the goal.

But why then is the goal unattainable?

It is because the goal exists not in reality but only the mind's fiction. Not by striving, but by bringing the mind at peace, by giving up even the idea of self, is it possible to attain that rest and equilibrium which form the foundation and essence of happiness.

But the striving, which is involved even in the attainment of states of spiritual absorption (*jhāna*), is attended with great difficulties and is known as the distressful path (*dukkha-paṭipadā*). It would be interesting to draw a comparison here with what mediaeval spiritual authors have called "the dark night of the soul."

Thus "dukkha" is not only bodily pain (*kāyika dukkha*) and mental distress (*cetasika dukkha*), that is physical and psychological suffering—it is also the ethical, religious experience as opposed to bliss and even the difficulty encountered in the process of attaining that bliss. Nay, even joy and delight itself is called sorrow-fraught: "*nandi pi dukkhā*": not merely because joy and delight are not lasting, but far more because delight is a fetter (*nandi-saṃyojana*) which will prevent the attainment of perfect freedom.

Though delight is thus shown as a source of sorrow, yet sorrow, well understood, can become a source of happiness. Here especially lies the greatness of the Buddha's teaching—that it shows the deliverance from sorrow and also from pleasure, which leads to sorrow.

Like the knowledge of an illness, though painful in itself, may be the reason why one consults a doctor, who finally cures the disease—similarly the understanding of all life as suffering will be the driving force to seek a remedy. And as of all religious teachers only the Buddha has pointed out *all* life as sorrow-fraught, it is natural that to him we turn in confidence.

Confidence is not the same as Faith. For Faith is in things that cannot be known; knowledge destroys faith and faith destroys itself, for it is based on that which it cannot know. Faith is defined (by Pope Pius X) as a real assent of the intellect, thus condemning those Modernists holding that faith is merely a blind feeling about religion in the sub-consciousness.

Voltaire said: "The proof of faith is that it is unintelligible." "Faith is to believe in something which your reason tells you cannot be true, for if your reason approved of it, there could be no question of blind faith." (Edwin Montagu).

Confidence, however, is not a mental acceptance of that which cannot be known; it is an assured expectation, not of an unknown beyond, but of what can be tested and experienced and understood by every one for oneself (*paccattaṃ vedītabbo viññūhi*). It is the confidence a student has in his teacher who explains in the classroom the inverse square law of gravitation as stated by Newton. But if the student has heard something of the relativity-theory of Einstein, he will not implicitly believe his teacher and his textbook, but reserve his judgment till the time that he will be able to investigate for himself.

Likewise a student of Buddhism will have confidence in the Teacher, because his teaching can be tested and ought to be tested. As a doctrine of actuality Buddhism cannot attach any value to blind submission. No possible good “can follow from the neglect of use of the very sense which lifts man sky-high above his surroundings, the use of reason. But when, walking on the Path, one sees the light grow while proceeding, one may safely continue in confidence and yet investigate the path step for step. It is that confidence, which is the immediate fruit of the understanding of sorrow: *dukkhupanisā saddhā*. And it is that same confidence which gives already that first taste of the happiness towards which all striving is moving. It is the joy (*pāmojja*) of having found a possibility to escape from this round of birth, suffering and death; the increase of that joy will become sheer delight (*pīti*) only to make place for a serene tranquillity (*passaddhi*) and that sense of security, equilibrium, the bliss of well-being (*sukha*), which is the very opposite of that sense of insecurity, unbalanced striving, which is sorrow-fraught (*dukkha*).

When this tranquillity and sense of security have been obtained through the experience and understanding of suffering, the vicissitudes of life will no longer be able to create disturbances in the peace of mind.

Concentration of mind (*samādhi*) will become a second nature; and in that natural peacefulness things will be seen in their real nature, not coloured by likes or dislikes, not disfigured by passions, not hazed by ignorance, like objects seen at the bottom of a rippleless lake of clear water.

It is with this knowledge and insight into the real nature of things (*yathābhūtañāṇadassana*) that the golden mean can be attained, when exaggerated enthusiasm is cooled down, thus preventing the disillusion of the idealist; on the other hand preventing also the other extreme which makes life materialistic, mechanical and sombre.

By seeing things as they really are, valueless trifles will not be treated as occurrences of the highest importance, which tend to make life unnecessarily complicated.

It will leave room for a sense of humour in which we may laugh even at ourselves, for it is the sense of actuality which gives the sense of humour, in which the world is seen but as the world:

“a stage where every man must play a part ”

(*Merchant of Venice*).

“a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
signifying nothing.”

(*Macbeth*, V. 5).

It is the lack of this insight that creates worry, a resultant of craving. The world puts all its “self” in every action, and thus the reaction is so keenly felt. Indeed, *dukkha* has no existence apart from *taṇhā*. This world is merely the shadow of truth, for the world as we know it is only the reaction of our contact and thus the reflection of our “self.” The more of “self” we have put in, the greater will be the reaction—thus we make our own sorrow and suffering. But for all that it remains a reaction all the same, a shadow, a reflection of self.

“The world is a comedy to those who think,
A tragedy to those who feel.”

(Horace Walpole).

We all can enjoy even the most terrible misery as long as it is painted upon a piece of canvas; then we can appreciate the skilfulness of the artist, the exquisiteness of forms, the beauty of

colours, hardly being moved by the represented misery. The reason is that it is not “real,” by which we mean that we do not take part in it, there is no “self” in it, and we are mere spectators.

Thus we are mere spectators in this picture palace of the universe. Even if we see ourselves acting on the screen, we know that that is no real self who suffers or rejoices. It is mere acting.

All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

(*As You Like It*, 11 7).

This sense of humour may seem rather grim now and then, as if mocking at what is holiest and dearest, at life itself. It is the grin of a skull which can look at life from the other side of the grave. Thus he who perceives and understands sorrow and the emptiness of sorrow, he perceives also a sense of the human comedy.

Through understanding the real nature of things, through understanding the nature and origin of sorrow and suffering, i.e. of actuality—weariness, repulsion, disgust (*nibbidā*) arise which can only lead to passionlessness, dispassion (*virāga*), the detachment from world and self, from matter and mind which is the real freedom and release (*vimutti*) for which we all are striving. Detachment, indeed, is not a morbid asceticism which aims at mortification of the flesh, or at subjection of the mind, but it should grow from understanding as necessarily as a flower in due season from a well developed plant. It is the knowledge of things as fearful (*bhaya-ñāṇa*) and the knowledge of things as dangerous (*ādīnava-ñāṇa*), the understanding of the evil of conditionality (*saṅkhāra-dukkha*) and of the evil of changeability (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*), which make craving and clinging impossible, because the object is no longer seen as one worthy to possess, but rather as one causing disgust. Craving for, and attachment to, disgusting states or things is impossible; and thus it is that the realization of suffering, so far from being pessimistic, leads to the deliverance from all suffering and even to the deliverance from a possible return.

Once a misconception is realized as such, it cannot be reinstated, but clarity of insight will lead to purity of virtue (*sīla-visuddhi*), the first of the seven stages of Purity on the way to Nibbāna.

Virtue thus purified will further purify the mind with further progress on the Path of Holiness, till finally the fruit of Sainthood (*arahatta-phala*) is obtained, where a final death with no more rebirth will make an absolute end to all suffering, happy (*sukha*) because free from all sorrow, desirable (*subha*) because free from all desires, which are the causes of sorrow, eternal (*dhuvva*) because free from becoming and rebirth which result in decay and death.

May all attain to that birth-less, death-less state, the supreme deliverance of heart and mind, Nibbāna.

The Process of Life

Kammaṃ satte vibhajati yadidaṃ hīnapaññatā

Kamma makes the distinction between
different grades of beings.

Where life's entirety can only be comprehended as an unsatisfactory process of change, the natural question will arise how this proceeding takes place. If this process is not only change and unsatisfactory (*anicca-dukkha*) but also a mere process of changes without an entity to pass on from change to change (*anattā*), it will be asked what is it then that changes, what is it that suffers and passes on that suffering, what is it that proceeds?

In a previous lecture we have seen already that Buddhism does not deny the individuality of the process, but merely the permanency of an individual.

Individual processes are differentiated and this is caused by kamma.

Beings are said to be owners of their deeds (*kammasaka*), for whatever we have of other possessions cannot be said to be ours in such an intimate degree as the actions, the deeds, which have produced this very existence and life. Of nothing else but our action, our kamma, can we be called owners in such an absolute sense, as over nothing else we have such absolute power of disposing.

We are called heirs to our deeds (*kammadāyāda*) for in the reaction we inherit the full consequences of our actions, so that whatever we are and in whatever condition we are, we must see therein the effect of past causes, the fruit of previously sown seed.

It is from action, from kamma, therefore, that we take our origin (*kammayoni*), so that kamma is compared with the mother's womb from where this life arose.

We are linked to kamma so closely, as family-ties (*kammabandhu*) that cannot be broken.

But also we have in kamma our greatest protection (*kammaṇṇisaṇṇā*), so that we need not rely upon any external agency as long as our deeds are good and pure.

"Whatever deed they do, either noble or evil, they become heirs to that." (Dasadhammasutta, AN 10).

Kamma (= *karma* in Sanskrit) cannot be comprehensively dealt with under one chapter heading, for all the truths and conclusion derived therefrom are centred in and emanating from the kamma-doctrine.

To understand kamma, one must first study the mind by which kamma is produced: and that is Psychology. The effects of this mind-production can be deduced to some extent by reason and experience: and that is Logic. Further, kamma leads to rebirth, renewed existence: and that is Ontology. Finally the moral aspect of skilful and unskilful action should lead to the overcoming of all kamma: and that is Ethics. Thus we see how this one word covers the whole of Buddhist Philosophy.

When analyzing a thought-unit (*cittuppāda*) into seventeen thought-moments (*cittakkhaṇa*), one will meet with some mind-impressions (*manosamphassa*), which are so weak (*paritta*, *atiparitta*) that they hardly disturb the subconscious stream (*bhavaṅga-sota*). But if an impression is strong enough (*mahanta*) to arrest the subconscious stream, thus not merely knocking at the sense doors, but actually forcing an entrance, gate-crashing, only then will full apperception (*javana*), consciousness in the full sense, arise.

Only now arises the possibility of forming new kamma. Thus we see that though kamma means action (from “*karoti*”: he acts), it is an action of the mind, therefore a thought, an active thought. Here our character is formed and hence the Buddha calls kamma our inheritance, and our parent. When physical elements are added to, and combined with others, something new emerges from that composition. Similarly, when psychical action is added to psychical results previously obtained, new life, new character will be produced.

Kamma thus is action, mental action; yet not all action of the mind or of the body is kamma.

Action will be present as long as there is existence, because existence is not static, but a process; and a process must proceed. The very existence of the senses consists in activity. As a flame cannot exist without consuming, its very nature being combustion, so the senses cannot exist without activity.

To understand this it will be good to remember that in Buddhist philosophic terminology the senses are not understood merely as the material organs. Each sense is considered as threefold: (1) the material base (subject), (2) the material object, (3) the appropriate connection. “If the subjective eye is in good order, and if external matter (e.g. visible form) comes into focus, but if there is no appropriate bringing together, then the corresponding species of consciousness (i.e. eye-consciousness) does not come into manifestation. But if the subjective eye is in good order and if external matter comes into focus, and if there is also the appropriate bringing together (conjunction), then the corresponding species of consciousness manifests itself.” (MN 28).

Thus if one of three conditions is wanting, no consciousness arises, and there will be no sense-activity. This is meant when it was said that the very existence of the senses consists in activity.

It is not the mere contact between subjective organ and external object that constitutes the activity. Not the wick drenched in oil produces the flame. After analyzing a poem into lines, each line into words, each word into letters, we still cannot say that those letters compose the poem: for, only when set in a particular order they will form words and sense; out of order they are sheer nonsense. Thus an individual can be analyzed into corporeality, sensations, perceptions, differentiations and conceptions. Yet the mere heaping up of those aggregates would not constitute a living process in the sense of growth, of development, of kamma-formations. For even in an Arahant are present all those aggregates; but in him is missing that which binds them together in activity: craving.

Like the mind of the poet gave order to the letters which thus received life, so does craving set the aggregates in working order; and rebirth is the effect. Who only considers the formation of the letters will never be able to read and understand the poem. Thus he who only analyses the body in anatomy, or the mind in psychology, will never be able to read, understand and solve the problem of kamma i.e. of life as craving.

If body or mind is conceived as a thing complete in itself, identical with itself, as an isolated self-contained entity, it becomes absolutely impossible to explain the interaction of different subjects upon one another. As long as the process of life is cut up into artificial segments, each of them considered as something static, it is impossible to conceive the whole as a process in which all is seen in its natural connection.

As long as one is concerned with analyzing individuality into the five aggregates of existence (*pañcakkhandha*), one might consider a person as a rounded off whole of mind and matter (*nāma rūpa*), isolated in so far as he is not another (*na ca añño*). But things become different as soon as one is concerned no longer with the component parts, but with the process of its growth, kamma.

One can consider a tree in itself, composed of leaves, fruits, twigs, branches, bark, wood and further characteristics. Those peculiarities make a tree what it is, that individual tree and not another one. But all those peculiarities and component parts of the individual have come there by a process of growth; and in this process of growth the individual can no longer be isolated (*na ca so*).

Kamma is a process of action, mental action, mental action with craving.

“Cetanaṃ ahaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi”

“I say, O monks, that kammic action is volition.”

In this process of volitional activity the aggregates of an individual are not parts of a whole, but forms of action, modes of grasping.

As action with volition, kamma does not come in the field of observation, except through its effect. This effect is the reaction (*vipāka*). It is somewhat incorrect to call this reaction old action (*purāṇa kamma*) for, if action is past, it is no more action, no process of actuality.

Yet to some extent the action is continuing its process in the reaction, which is entirely dependent on that previous action. It is with a view on the inherent connection of condition and effect that both will always belong to the same class. In dependence on the desirability or non-desirability of the effect, its cause is called either skilful (*kusala*) or unskilful (*akusala*).

From the fact that thus kamma is always either moral or immoral, it must be clear that kamma is the very opposite of fate, with which it is sometimes confused. For fate has nothing to do with morality, as it is a predetermining power (real or imaginative) that fixes one's destiny with disregard of action, good or bad. Fate interferes with the working of cause and effect in so far as it produces results which are not caused by corresponding acts. As a denial of cause and effect fate must be dismissed as a mere fiction.

The undesirable effect of *akusala kamma* in some conditions cannot be altered, but has merely to be outlived.

Take as illustration a man who has borrowed 100 pounds from his master in order to marry. The feast being over, he finds himself incapable of repaying the debt. If the master is kind-hearted, he might not confiscate his property, but say e.g. that his servant can pay him off with his work, one day counting for one pound. In that case a hundred days will be needed before the accounts are squared, before the servant can begin to earn again something. During that period no new acquisition can he made, but his previous possessions remain his all the same.

Somewhat similarly *akusala kamma* can effect a rebirth in such a state of misery that no new *kusala* action can be done there. This undesirable effect has simply to be outlived, “till the last penny of the debt is paid.” When the effect of that unskilful action is exhausted, like a cloud which has shed all its rain, then naturally like the sunshine, the previously accumulated good tendencies will produce their good effects (*kusala vipāka*). This can happen at any time whenever the opportunity is favourable. It is *this* accumulated kamma (*katatta kamma*) that can become indefinitely effective (*aparāpariya vedanīya kamma*). If, however, it would miss the opportunity to become effective, it would become “dead,” unproductive (*ahosi kamma*).

This unproductiveness is the only escape from this repeated round of rebirth (*saṃsāra*). From this possibly unproductive kamma one can clearly understand that Buddhism is neither an absolutely rigid law of cause and effect, where every seed must produce its fruits, nor fatal predetermination, nor blind chance.

“There are these three sources of irrational views,” it is said in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (*Tikanipāṭa*, *Mahāvagga* 61), “which are questioned, investigated and abandoned by the wise

who follow the hereditary traditions—three sources of irrational views which establish themselves in the denial of kamma: (1) there are some who believe that all is a result of acts in previous lives; (2) there are others who believe that all is the result of creation by a Supreme Ruler; (3) there are others again who believe that everything arises without reason or cause. But then if a person becomes a murderer, a thief, an adulterer, etc., if this would be due to past actions, or made by the creation of a Supreme Ruler, or if this would happen by mere chance, then one would not be responsible for evil action.”

Kamma is the very opposite of all these irrational views, because it is action itself; and upon each new action depends all further effects. If that action produces results and that depends on other actions—those results will correspond to their cause. Any other view is unproved, unprovable, illogical, irrational, untenable.

“Karma avoids the superstitious extreme, on the one hand, of those who believe in the separate existence of some entity called the soul; and the irreligious extreme, on the other, of those who do not believe in moral justice and retribution.” (*Buddhism*: Prof. T. W. Rhys Davids, p. 103).

What we are and that we are is not mere chance; it is not rigid determinism either, for that would leave unexplained the differences in faculties and modes of life. As a scientific law, be it physical or biological, is clearly not a law with binding force, but only a description of a way of action, constant as far as our observation goes—similarly the law of kamma is not a necessity of causality where every action must produce its effect. Laws are like grammatical rules for a language, which have always some exceptions and might become modified in time through the progressive use of that language. Similarly an effect of a certain action cannot be predicted, because there are so many factors present which through their influence might support, impede, modify or even destroy the effect altogether. Not causality, but conditionality!

Though we speak of causality as the foundation of Buddhism, we should not take it in too strict a sense. As in science so in daily life everything is based on cause and effect—what would be the chaos in the kitchen, if one day the salt were no longer salt! Yet modern physics sees the need of a certain free play for chance or fate, so that natural laws are not determinate and uniform for each individual case, but for the average. In the same way we cannot always speak of causation, but rather of *condition*, which has not such a rigid meaning and corresponds more faithfully to the Pāli: *paccayā*, as it is used in the last book of the *Abhidhamma*, the *Paṭṭhāna*, the Book of Origination.

If we pay attention to the operative force (*kicca*), kamma is fourfold.

Reproductive or generative kamma (*janaka kamma*) is that action which acts again in the combination of mind and matter (*nāma rūpa*) or in other words the plant that gives fruits, the cause that produces effects (*vipāka*). Once having reproduced itself, this kind of kamma is lost in its effect and cannot generate, germinate again. It is, so to say, a transformation, if that term be understood properly i.e. not in the sense of an entity, but of a process of growth. Like the seed from which a plant has grown cannot germinate again, because it has no more existence, but lives in the plant, so this reproductive kamma is exhausted in the act of generating. Yet the effect produced may make itself known during very long periods and many lives. It will always be, however, of the same kind as the generating kamma force.

During this course of process new actions, called supporting kamma (*upatthambhaka kamma*), may maintain the effects of previous actions or even intensify them, thus leading from good to better, or from bad to worse. On the other hand, counteractive action (*upapīlaka kamma*) may interfere with the working out of the effects of reproductive (*janaka*) action, weakening, modifying, impeding its potential energy, thus making good effects less good and evil effects

less evil. If this kind of counter-action is so strong as to completely annihilate the effects of previous kamma, it is called destructive kamma (*upaghātaka kamma*). This fourfold division according to the operating forces or function is the most important for the proper understanding of kamma. For, if all action would be reproductive, an escape from the effects would not be possible and the faring on through this round of repeated rebirths (*saṃsāra*) would be endless. Only because action can counterbalance action, and thus nullify the otherwise unavoidable result, deliverance is a possibility.

The possibilities of supporting, counteracting or annihilating the good or evil effects of action that would have been normally reproductive, depend entirely on the potential efficacy of the interfering activity. Thus there are four possibilities of producing effects (*pākādāna*).

Weighty kamma (*garuka kamma*) is that kind of action, the effects of which cannot be counterbalanced. They are fixed as to their consequences for good or for bad. Fixed in good results (*sammatta niyatā*) are e.g. the four paths (*ariya magga*) in the quest of Nibbāna inevitably establishing the state of exemption from a miserable rebirth. Fixed in bad results (*micchatta niyatā*) are the five crimes which find retribution in a miserable rebirth without delay i.e. immediately on the disintegration of the aggregates of existence (*ānantarika kamma*) namely matricide, parricide, murder of an Arahant, wounding of a Buddha, causing a schism in the Sangha. Sometimes we find also “wrong views” (*micchā-diṭṭhi*) mentioned as such a crime. In that case “wrong views” means the extreme perversity of opinion, disregard even of the law of causality and moral retribution, and not mere disbelief, resultant from lack of knowledge. Thus it will be seen that, only in rare occasions, kamma will be of such a nature that nothing else can influence it.

It is logically the very last thought of a life-span which decides the immediately following rebirth; therefore it is called death proximate (*āsanna*) kamma.

Thought giving rise to thought, as a flame sets all burning which it can lay hold of—and the last thought of a life-time being extremely weak owing to the failing physical conditions under which it arises—this last dying thought will lack the power to influence or modify for better or for worse and thus it will give rise to the re-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi viññāṇa*) according to its own nature. And so it happens that this one single last thought determines a whole coming life. Usually, of course, it will be one’s habitual mode of thinking that will prevail, when in dying all resistance has been reduced to a minimum. This habitual (*āciṇṇa*) kamma is one’s tendency for good or bad, formed through numerous repeated actions during one’s life. It is extremely improbable—though not impossible—that in one’s dying hours one should be able to break the fetters of habit forged during a whole lifetime. But even if this would happen through force of external conditions, e.g. relations reminding the dying man of a certain good action done many years ago, this would not mean that all the other actions have become ineffective.

The kamma, which through force of circumstances cannot express itself, may do so at any time when conditions are more favourable. Till then it is said to be accumulated (*kaṭattā*).

Take for example a miser. The energy of his whole life having been directed towards the hoarding of wealth, he has made avarice his habitual kamma (*āciṇṇa*). Thus most likely his last thought will be one of craving for, and attachment to, his possessions, and of regret to be unable to take his wealth with him. If he dies with such-like thoughts, no other rebirth can be expected but in the planes of “unsatisfiable” desire (*petayoni*). But it may happen that through kindly influence of relations his last thoughts are directed towards nobler ideals, thus resulting in a happy rebirth owing to his good death-proximate (*āsanna*) kamma. As, however, the cause of this good effect was only his one last thought, the fruits thereof may very soon be exhausted, and then the habitual kamma of the miser which was temporarily suspended as accumulative

(*kaṭattā*) kamma will get the upper hand. This exhaustion of proximate kamma may be an explanation of the death of embryos and infants.

The reverse might happen equally well, in which case a last thought of worry, e.g. temporarily suspends the natural consequences of a very virtuous life, as it is said to have happened in the case of Queen Mallikā, whose subsequent life in a state of misery lasted only for seven days.

Other *kammic* thoughts can become effective only in the second birth, in which case they are called subsequently effective (*upapajja vedanīya kamma*). If such a thought does not get the opportunity then, it becomes inoperative (*ahosi kamma*). Weaker even than this kind is the initial stage, the first moment of a thought-unit, which also becomes ineffective (*ahosi*), unless it can produce an effect in that life itself (*diṭṭha dhamma vedanīya kamma*). Kamma which is so strong that it can produce an effect at any other than the above mentioned births is called indefinitely effective (*aparāpariya vedanīya kamma*).

Properly classified, kamma is thus:

A. According to function (*kicca*):

1. Reproductive (*janaka*)
2. Supportive (*upatthambhaka*)
3. Counteractive (*upapīlaka*)
4. Destructive (*upaghātaka*)

B. According to the strength of effect (*pākadāna*):

1. Serious (*garuka*)
2. Death-proximate (*āsanna*)
3. Habitual (*āciṇṇa*)
4. Accumulative (*kaṭattā*)

C. According to the time of taking effect (*pākakāla*):

1. Effective in this very life (*diṭṭha dhamma vedanīya*)
2. Effective in the next life (*upapajja vedanīya*)
3. Indefinitely effective (*aparāpariya vedanīya*)
4. Ineffective (*ahosi*)

D. According to the spheres of effect (*pākaṭṭhāna*):

1. Unskilful in the spheres of sense (*akusala-kāmāvacara*)
2. Skilful in the spheres of sense (*kāmāvacara kusala*)
3. Skilful in the spheres of form (*rūpāvacara kusala*)
4. Skilful in the formless spheres (*arūpāvacara kusala*)

“If anyone says, O monks, that a man *must* necessarily reap according to (all) his deeds, in that case there is no religious striving possible, nor is there an opportunity to end sorrow. But, if one maintains, O monks, that what a man reaps is the result of (some of) his deeds, in that case striving for holiness is possible and also the ending of sorrow” (AN).

The reproductivity of kamma leads us necessarily to the problem of rebirth. A problem indeed, for if there is kamma there must be rebirth and yet there is none to be reborn according to the teaching of anattā. It is again the misconception of self-entity that poses the problem; and it is the process of actuality that solves it. The mere asking of the question, “What is reborn?” is based on the ignorance of the self-less process of kamma. Kamma is not an entity that moves from life to life, as a visitor goes from house to house; but kamma is life itself, in so far as life is

the product (*vipāka*) of kamma. In each step we make now in full-grown age lie also the feeble attempts of our babyhood. As actions they were a process that ceased with the act, but that process set further processes working, actual processes.

The present actuality, which expresses itself as the result of all the preceding processes, carries in its very action all the efforts that went into the making of the previous actions. This continuity without identity—like a flame arises ever new, being fed by ever-new fuel, and yet depends in its very existence upon its continued burning—this continuity of the process is kamma, and this lack of identity is *anattā*.

Kamma thus is not an entity; but a process, an action, energy, in-force, i.e. a force not derived from some external agency, but from its intrinsic nature. Now that in-force which constitutes the process of action, which makes action act, that is craving—like the process of combustion makes the flame burn and consume everything that is combustible, like the mere exposure to the atmosphere sets a process of oxidization going in certain metals.

Now a flame is not “born” from wood or coal or straw, for those materials can lie side by side for hundreds of years without being burnt. They are merely the opportunity given to maintain a flame. A flame originates not in fuel but in friction and can thus arise even in materials that are not combustible, as e.g. flint and steel. Fuel only proffers an opportunity to the process to continue.

The application to the process of kamma will be clear. The actual origin of life is not the sexual act of a male and a female; they only provide the opportunity for a terminating life-kamma to take a new lease. As a wick, though dipped and drenched in oil, will not give light unless a flame is applied to it—like visible objects, though coming into focus will not be seen by the eye, if there is no consciousness—so also “it is by the conjunction of three things that conception comes about. If there be the coition of the parents and it is the mother’s proper period, but if there is not the necessity of generation, then no conception takes place” (MN 38).

Now, this necessity of generation or rather re-generation is in oriental fashion poetically described as a heavenly musician presiding over child conception (*gandhabbo*). It is clear, of course, that here is meant that karmic energy, which in its natural tendency of craving seeks to lay hold of new matter as sustenance in its process of action, of life.

A flame which was burning on the wax of a candle, may continue to burn on the oil of a lamp, on the cloth of the curtains, on the furniture of the room, on the woodwork of the whole house. This does not mean that wax has become in succession oil, cloth, wood; for these were only the fuel which kept the flame alive; not so much as actively feeding the flame, but as being grasped by the flame passively.

An electric current may produce light in an electric bulb, or music in a radio set, or motion in an electric fan or heat in a stove. But, once more, this does not mean that light has become in succession music, motion and heat; for the bulb, the radio set, the fan, the stove, were only the means through which the electric current could express itself.

In a similar way the different modes of life, as well as the constant modifications in life are only different means of expression of kamma. Thus in the ultimate sense one ought not to say that Buddhism teaches evolution in the sense of Darwinism, though Darwin was probably right when he taught the Origin of Species. He taught evolution in the biological, physiological sense, i.e. he traced the originating series of the matter through which life expresses itself, as one might trace the origin of a candle to the wax manufactured by the bees without explaining thereby how the candle became alight. Like fire cannot be traced by following the series of fuel dependent on which the process of combustion continued uninterrupted, so the genealogy of man is not shown by tracing the evolution of the body in the series of vertebrates, even though

that probably be correct. It is kamma as a process of craving which gives the “impulse,” the “*élan vital*,” as Bergson calls it. In this process, however, it is not the mind and matter which are involved; their evolution belongs to a different type. In this process it is the evolution of kamma that causes rebirth (cf. *Milinda Pañhā*, 11.2–6), and as an evolution the different phases of expression of that kamma, be it even in different lives, bear the common responsibility.

This process of kammic evolution is not necessarily progress. Progress can only be considered from a fixed standpoint outside the process, but such a standpoint there is not. Process of evolution, however, could be retrogression as well as progress, because it is mere change or growth; and even degeneration, deterioration, is still a process of growth. Even in the physical sense the decay of one means the growth of another.

The frequently repeated question whether it is possible for a man to be born as an animal is really incorrect from a Buddhist point of view; for this question implies the existence of a human entity to be changed into an animal entity in its following existence.

It is craving, as the inherent force of kammic action that tends to express, to perpetuate, to reproduce. Without this tendency action would not be kamma, would not be craving. But beastly actions of the passions will naturally tend to produce beastly effects, and then the process will be evolution of retrogression. Virtuous actions and self-control will naturally tend to produce holy effects, and then the process will be evolution of progress. Actions of selflessness, of pure unselfishness, will have no tendency to reproduce and hence will not further express themselves in effects.

When a being is born, it is neither created, not merely propagated by its parents, but it is a product of action in the past. The action (*kamma*) as volition (*cetanā*) has constituted certain tendencies (*saṅkhāra*), inclinations and repulsions, likes and dislikes, a character which owing to the lust for life (*bhavataṇhā*) will seek to express itself again; and that is the evolution of rebirth (*bhava-paccayā jāti*).

Rebirth will take place where those kammic tendencies will find the most agreeable surroundings to express themselves, the most suitable soil to take root again, the most kindred atmosphere to produce new fruits. This might be called the sympathy of kammic forces. If it thus happens that a mother’s womb, having just received the sperm, is physically and kammically well disposed, a conception might take place, finally resulting in the birth of a child, having some or many of the characteristics of its parents, not because it has inherited those from them, but owing to the sympathy and attraction of similar kammic tendencies. Like the lightning from a thundercloud will never enter into the water of a deep well, but will always seek the metal point of the lightning-conductor on the tip of a tower, for there it finds its greatest attraction—so the tendencies of a character will be attracted by, will sympathize with, those tendencies which are nearest in the sense of affinity.

Yet the opposite might happen, when a dying thought contains an element of hate or revenge, for those vices can never be so fully satisfied, as when in near relationship with the disliked object. Then the very antipathy of kammic tendencies might become the reason of attraction, like the positive and negative poles of a magnet.

If at the moment of the sexual act, there is no kamma attracted to take rebirth from these particular parents, their act will remain barren.

While the theory of heredity does not explain why not all the characteristics of father and mother are inherited, the Buddhist explanation is thus that the child does not inherit from father and mother, who only provided the opportunity, but that it brings its own inheritance, namely kamma, with it at the time of conception. It is this third factor, kamma, which besides the sperm and the ovum decides the conception at rebirth. Kamma thus is the real “natural selection”

which struggles on for existence, resulting not in the survival of the fittest, but of the greatest craving, which will reproduce itself for good or for bad, till insight will deprive action of that reproductive force, leading it on to no-more rebirth.

When thus all action will have been stilled, no further craving can disturb the peace, where the wheel of rebirth can no longer revolve, the peace of perfect freedom from lust, hate and delusion, the Deliverance of Nibbāna.

Dependent Origination

“Five causes were there in the past,
And now a five-fold fruit.
Five causes in this present life,
A five-fold fruit to come.”

When speaking of origination, one can approach the subject from two different viewpoints. One is the view of those who believe in a supernatural cause and thus maintain an ultimate beginning or creation. To them the Buddha repeatedly declared that an absolute first beginning of existence is something unthinkable, and that all such like speculations may lead to imbecility (AN 4:77). We shall revert to this view after having explained the Buddha’s doctrine of origination.

His doctrine is not fruitless speculation, but is based on actuality. Hence it will be understood best, when as starting point is taken not some imaginary time in the untraceable past, called “In the beginning ...” but an actual fact of the present, which is open to investigation and experiment.

The fact of suffering and the fact that *all* is suffering, because all is impermanent, is indeed the actual basis from which one can start the reconstruction pointing towards origination; it is also the basis from which the work of Deliverance can be started.

Unless the fact of suffering is understood as universal, as explained on a previous occasion, it is impossible to find out its origin, impossible to find deliverance therefrom. Here is no revelation needed, and hence the supernatural signifies nothing; here mere argument avails nothing, for mere words cannot solve an actual problem. And thus we start not with the beginning, but with the actual, experimental fact that life is sorrow-fraught.

Now it is clear that this sorrow and disappointment, due to the impermanence of all things, is only possible where there is conscious life to perceive the same. Thus we have the well-known formula, *jāti-paccayā jarā-maraṇaṃ*: dependent on birth is old age, death and all kinds of woe. As death should be understood in the sense of dissolution in the physical as well as in the psychical sense, so birth should be understood in the sense of conception, physical and mental. Thus rebirth and death do not occur only once at the beginning and the end of a lifetime respectively, but at every new thought-moment, so that the saying, “*quotidie morior*”: I die daily, (1 Cor. Xv.31) receives an unexpectedly new meaning in the Buddhist sense. It is the wrong view of seeing death only at the end of a lifetime which produces that misconception of a self, transmigrating from life to life.

Death is not caused by birth, neither is sorrow, but both are dependent in their arising on the fact of birth. Thus birth is the *conditio sine qua non*, the *upanissaya paccayā*, the condition of sufficing efficiency. It is the natural disposition (*pakatūpanissayā*) of any birth to give rise to sorrow; not the cause thereof, but the necessary circumstance under which that relation obtains, an indispensable, antecedent phenomenon. The characteristics of decline (*jaratā*) and impermanence (*aniccatā*) are natural to all matter. They are not produced by any principle at all, i.e. not by kamma, mind, season or nutriment (*lakkhaṇāni na jāyanti kehici ti pakāsitam*)

Where suffering is dependent on birth by which it is conditioned, birth itself is caused by kamma.

“Dependent on the kamma-process of becoming is rebirth” (*bhava-paccayā jāti*). It is the active kamma process that produces the passive rebirth-process (*uppatti-bhava*), where the reaction has

to work out, where the result (*vipāka*) has to be outlived. It is the will to live that makes one live again. It is this lust for life that conditions the kind of life to come. No other doctrine can explain the differences that appear, though outward conditions may be absolutely the same. This process of becoming is volition transmuted into action with skilful or unskilful consequences. As soon as the opportunity is favourable it will reproduce itself, express itself, according to the nature of the means of expression at its disposal. Thus it is that the process of kamma is the process of becoming and the cause of rebirth.

The differences which can be observed even where external conditions of parents, blood and food are equal as in the case of twins, cannot be without a cause, cannot be mechanical products, for they do not always happen to all. As in the subjective continuity of those beings no other reason can be found, the process of becoming must be due to kamma.

It is true that there are many who wish to give this doubtful honour to some supernatural intervention. But this explanation, instead of solving the problem inside the process, induces a mysterious factor from outside, thus making the problem even more complicated and unsolvable indeed. It is no good trying to explain a mystery by one still more intricate. Moreover, he who claims the honour for the good, ought to take also the blame for the evil.

It is the kamma-process that leads to rebirth, as a flame burns on through its inner nature in a process of combustion. And like a flame will always lay hold of fresh material so long as that is available, so kamma will lay hold of new material to express its process of craving. For kamma is essentially volition.

Dependent on clinging, arises the kamma-process (*upādāna-paccayā bhavo*).

From the different kinds of clinging it can be understood how subtle is its working, and how difficult it must be to escape its meshes. There is the grosser clinging to sensuous pleasures (*kāmūpādāna*). Though few are able to free themselves entirely from this snare, it is not so difficult to be at least aware of the danger. All spiritual men have given their warnings—all have spoken in praise of control over the senses.

But not only the body with its natural passions must be tamed; the mind which guides the activities of the other senses ought to be controlled, its wild activities and fancies checked. A forcible repression of the bodily senses only will naturally result in a reaction that might be dangerous from a mental point of view. Suppressed passionate tendencies have often led to serious hallucinations; and if that suppression is done with a supernatural motive, it always leads to fanaticism, where sometimes blood-thirsty hate is taken for love of truth.

The clinging to erroneous opinions (*diṭṭhupādāna*) is, therefore, much more dangerous, because where error is seen as the truth, all further consequences will be seen in the wrong light even though their deduction be correct—like a sum cannot be worked out properly, even if the method be correct, if there was an initial mistake in the thesis. One of the most common erroneous opinions is the one that sees motion everywhere and nothing moved without a cause, and yet maintains that there can be a mover who moves all but not himself.

The clinging to mere ritual (*sīlabbatupādāna*) is the superstition, when e.g. through outward washing inner purity is sought. Similar actions can be classed as spiritual bribery and only betray a lack of moral courage and sense of responsibility. It is not only an over-valuation of means to a certain end, but reliance upon inappropriate actions which are, therefore, not means at all.

The clinging to the belief in a self (*attavādupādāna*) is the most subtle of all and hence the most difficult to overcome. It is this fetter of self-illusion (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) in all its twenty modes, which prevents one even from entering the Path to holiness (*sotāpanna*). It is this root of selfishness

which underlies all growth of kamma and of rebirth. It is the heat of the fire that keeps the water boiling and makes ever new steam develop.

But this clinging could not arise if there were not craving first. Through craving is conditioned clinging (*taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ*). It is craving for sense-pleasures (*kāma-taṇhā*) that leads to sensuous clinging. It is craving for eternal existence (*bhava-taṇhā*) which gives rise to clinging to the belief in a self (*attavādupādāna*). It is craving for annihilation (*vibhava-taṇhā*) which is the origin of clinging to erroneous opinions (*diṭṭhupādāna*). By not realizing the necessity of effects arising from causes, the possibility of further effects will be overlooked and thus rebirth denied. Craving for annihilation might also lead one to employ inappropriate means to nullify kammic reactions by superstitious practices (*sīlabbatūpādāna*).

Craving is the real turning point, the crank that sets the wheel of rebirth, the machinery of life and death working. Craving imparts selfishness, that is, the “I”-concept, to mere sensation, thus fertilizing the seeds produced by previous action. Here with craving, the problem of rebirth is given anew, and with the cessation of craving this problem is solved. In the process of craving, kamma is conceived which in due time will grow out into rebirth and death—like from friction the spark is born which will grow out into a conflagration. With this process of grasping is given the explanation of individuality, for life is a process of grasping.

If craving is dissolved, the whole world becomes a mere play of the senses, where the self is no longer an actor. Where the self does not act there is no kamma and no more rebirth, so that with the ending of craving the turning of the wheel of saṃsāra will have come to a stop.

This, however, does not explain the beginning, the origination of craving. Craving, clinging, desire, volition, will, is not a force which is stored up to be discharged at any moment, but it arises anew over and over again; and in its arising lies the meaning of this whole play of world-events. For apart from this “I” the world has no meaning. The “I” is a reaction; and without this reaction how can action be known? This reaction is sensation, and on this sensation is dependent craving (*vedanā paccayā taṇhā*).

Here again, sensation or feeling is not the cause of craving, but merely a condition, for without sensation no craving can arise, and yet not all sensation needs to produce craving. Here alone a break is possible; here alone in the long chain of conditioned reactions it is possible to come to a stop. If all feeling would result in craving with all its evil consequences, the attainment of Arahātship and Nibbāna would be impossible. Like a seed can grow up into a plant under favourable circumstances and yet those circumstances, however necessary, are not the cause of the plant, but mere conditions to its growth—so sensation *can* develop into craving, if the conditions thereto are favourable. The favourable condition to the arising of craving is ignorance, for if knowledge of the real nature of things were present, craving would be impossible. It is thus to ignorance (*avijjā*) that we shall have to trace the origin of craving.

Feeling or sensation in any of its three modes of pleasure, pain or indifference, in so far as it is a karma-resultant, is the condition without which no craving can arise (*vedanā-paccayā taṇhā*). Thus pleasurable feeling might give rise to craving for more; painful feeling to craving for freedom therefrom and indifferent feeling to craving for its tranquil sensation. Feeling, however, cannot arise without contact (*phassa*); sensation cannot arise without the senses (*saḷāyatana*). Here it is clearly seen that the causal chain of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*) should not be understood as a pure succession of cause and effect; it is the growth, the development, the evolution process where the successive stage is contained in germ-form, as it were, in the preceding one, requiring only the proper conditions to sprout forth. Thus in the six senses of mind and body are contained the possibilities of contact and sensation. Similarly in consciousness (*viññāṇa*) are contained the other three mental groups of sensation, perception

and mental formations (*vedanā, saññā, saṅkhāra*). Thus it is said that through consciousness are conditioned corporeality and mentality (*viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpa*) and that dependent on the six senses of body and mind arise contact and sensation (*saḷāyatana-paccayā phasso*). Consciousness and its mental concomitants, hence also sense impression or contact and feeling or sensation, are all simultaneously arising and hence related in the sense of co-existence (*saha jāta-paccaya*), as a candle which is burning, burns together with its heat and light. But they are also mutually supporting one another (*aññamañña-nissaya paccayā*), like “when three sticks are set upright leaning against one another at their upper ends, each of them depends on, and is depended on by, the other two ... if one of them falls, all will fall at the same time.” (Ledi Sayādaw).

Consciousness itself, however, is a product of kamma-formations in the past (*saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇam*). As the kamma process in the present (*kamma-bhava*) will produce birth and its consequences, so the kamma-formations of the past (*saṅkhāra*) have produced this present conscious life. Like the kamma-process in the present finds its origin in craving and clinging, so the kamma of the past was formed in ignorance (*avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*). Craving and ignorance are synonymous. Craving is ignorance, for in ignorance we crave for things impermanent, sorrow-fraught and substanceless.

Further back than ignorance we cannot go, for if there would have been a time when there was no ignorance, there ought to have been knowledge supreme. But to say that knowledge supreme has produced ignorance is as nonsensical as to say that perfection could produce imperfection, that goodness could produce evil. Ignorance thus stands as the sufficient reason for life, when life is seen as a process of grasping.

Is ignorance then the ultimate beginning of everything? This question so frequently put is ignorance manifest.

To speak of a beginning where there is no entity is a sheer impossibility. A process can *have* no beginning, but *is* beginning constantly, can have no end, but is ceasing constantly. Not to understand this is ignorance; and dependent on ignorance arise the kamma-formations, which through processes of conscious grasping lead to rebirth, which is sorrow-fraught.

It is in ignorance that the “I”-concept is formed; it is in craving that the “I”-concept is maintained. Ignorance creates a delusion, and craving clings to it. And thus comes about this whole play of world-events which turns round the “self” like a wheel round its axle. But as, when the axle is broken the wheel will not turn any more, so, when the delusion of self is destroyed, when insight has destroyed ignorance, no further craving can arise, no further kamma can be formed, the wheel of saṃsāra will no more turn, the process of becoming and rebirth will have come to a stop.

Where ignorance thus gives rise to craving, the freedom from craving can only be obtained through the overcoming of ignorance in the insight into the real nature of things. Ignorance also is a kind of understanding—it is *mis*-understanding; it is cognition with craving and thus it leads to formation i.e. kamma. But cognition without craving, that is *right* understanding which does not lead to further formation of kamma.

This understanding is not to be obtained by mere reasoning. Through purity of virtue, through renunciation and mind-control, insight will grow—insight into the real nature of things. When things are seen as void of self and impermanent, they will be understood as sorrow-fraught and the First Noble Truth will have been realized. When it is further seen that all our disappointment arises from our craving for things void and impermanent, then craving will become an impossibility. If there is no more craving, there will be no more kamma-process of

becoming, resulting in rebirth. Thus while ignorance stands as the origin of all this suffering through grasping, insight alone offers the deliverance therefrom.

Where a beginning as ultimate origin cannot be pointed out, just because there are no entities but mere processes rolling on—because nothing has a beginning but is only a phase in the process of evolution which is always beginning—yet this process can come to a stop simply by no more beginning, by no more becoming.

Let past be past, no future longings house:
The past is dead, the morrow not yet born.
Whoso with insight scans his heart today,
Let him ensure eternal changelessness!" (Bhaddekaratta Sutta, MN 131).

This goal cannot be attained by striving, for striving under any form keeps the process moving. But the truth has to be lived so that it may grow naturally, till the light of insight will have dispelled all shadows of ignorance, and the deliverance from all craving, which is the bliss beyond all feeling, will have surmounted all happiness and sorrow in the cessation of becoming, Nibbāna.

Nibbāna

Sorrow is found in all three worlds,
Its origin by craving wrought,
Its ceasing is Nibbāna called,
The path thereto transcendent thought. (*Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* 509)

Once more we must make the universal fact of suffering the starting point of our quest. And if this time our goal is the highest, the best, the final attainment of Nibbāna, even that goal ought to be understood in the light of the truth or suffering. For Nibbāna is the deliverance from all sorrow.

This certainly is not a subject for speculations. As sorrow must be understood and experienced, so the deliverance therefrom must both be understood and experienced. And only he who has experienced will understand. But that understanding cannot benefit others except in the way of encouragement to follow up along the same path, so that we too may learn and discern, understand and experience “each one for himself” (*paccattaṃ*).

Vānasaṅkhātāya taṇhāya nikkhantattā nibbānan’ti vuccati

As a departure from that kind of craving, which is lust, it is called Nibbāna. (*Abhidh-s* 458).

Even if Nibbāna, objectively considered, is viewed as the absolute truth, the ultimate reality, the highest perfection, the further shore, the final goal, and bliss supreme—yet it must never be overlooked that this objectivity is entirely due to our subjective viewpoint. Even if Nibbāna is often described in terms of positive happiness like peace, bliss, calm, permanence, freedom, deliverance—this is only so through the departure of all that had the nature of a fetter to rebirth and sorrow.

Certainly Nibbāna is the highest bliss (*paramaṃ sukhaṃ*). But if this bliss be understood as a blissful experience, a happy feeling or sensation, Nibbāna would be subject to impermanence and sorrow, because all feelings, perceptions, mental formations and concepts are impermanent and therefore sorrow-fraught. Happiness which can be experienced is, therefore, not the highest bliss, because it bears within itself the germ of dissolution. The highest bliss, therefore, must be beyond the experience of the senses. “It is just because there is no sense-experience that Nibbāna is happiness,” said the Venerable Sāriputta.

Thus only by holding fast to the negative aspect of Nibbāna will it be possible to approach the subject intelligently. Yet that is not the real approach. This should be done not by understanding but by realizing.

For the sake, however, of encouragement in the quest for truth, we have also the means of an intellectual approach which has no further meaning and importance though, than that of a map to a traveller in an unknown land. There, like here, all names are new and strange, but can be identified at each stage of progress till the goal is reached. From the outset we must be prepared, however, to leave behind our own mode of thinking, like the traveller his home. And though travelling on the map only and by reading books can be highly interesting and can be done in an easy chair at home, yet it cannot be compared with the actual journey, even if that would involve much fatigue and discomfort. What then shall we say about the actual attainment?

But here already we have to leave alone our comparison, and at once the language becomes unfamiliar, for “though there is a road, there is no traveller” (*maggamatthi, gāmaṃ na vijjati*).

That Nibbāna *is*, is beyond doubt; for where there is the thesis of a process; there must be also the anti-thesis of no-more-proceeding. Thus with the thesis of the process of life as suffering is given also the anti-thesis of the deliverance from suffering through the ending of the process of becoming—and with this we have the clearest definition of Nibbāna: cessation of becoming, *Bhavanirodho nibbānaṃ* (S II 117).

Where becoming stands for the arising of sensations and conceptions, for rebirth and its consequences of woe and death, for impermanence and sorrow, for the arising of fear and craving, for the growth of the roots of all evil, of greed, hate and delusion, for the tightening of material and spiritual bonds—there the cessation of becoming will naturally be viewed as bliss supreme. But this bliss of the cessation of becoming can only be understood when becoming itself is understood as suffering.

But because becoming is thought of as desirable—notwithstanding “birth, old age, sickness and death are like cowherds with staves in their hands, which drive beings on, and cut life short as with an axe” (Dhp Com. 135)—because there are few or none that desire absence of rebirth, cessation of becoming is not understood as bliss. In the delusion of self it is seen as annihilation; and annihilation it is—namely of the delusion of self.

But like a man given over to the excessive use of drugs will always take more, preferring to dream on rather than to face actuality, so the world clings to the delusion of self and considers deliverance therefrom as undesirable. In the quest for truth, however, satisfaction and beauty come last. Both being entirely subjective, they arise and disappear with the idea of self. Self is the shadow made by our own action, moving along with it, inseparable. As the shadow is longest when the sun stands lowest, to become smaller while the sun rises higher, so the delusion of self is greatest when the light of insight is lowest; but with the increase of insight the delusion will decrease. It is this growth of insight that will finally lead to the deliverance from all delusion.

As always in Buddhism, so here in the development of insight also, the starting point is actuality. Thus the first insight required will be insight into the real nature of conditioned things (*sammasana ñāṇa*) as having the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and soullessness. They have to be seen as one, for who perceives sorrow but not the transience thereof has nothing but the pain without the hope of deliverance. But as soon as the unreality of life is understood, also the unreality of suffering will be seen.

From this understanding of unreality, insight in the nature of all things as processes (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*) will ripen. This does not merely mean the observation that things grow and decay, but the understanding that there is nothing but a process of becoming.

The understanding of the process of becoming will naturally lead to the next step, which is insight that becoming is ceasing (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*). Though this step should follow quite logically, yet it is a difficult one for many who in the very fact of becoming find all their delight. But if becoming and ceasing are seen as two aspects of one process, then insight into what is to be feared (*bhaya-ñāṇa*) will arise naturally. Fear should lead to understanding of the danger (*ādīnava-ñāṇa*) inherent in clinging to mere processes of cessation, and of the reasons to be disgusted with such an empty show (*nibbidā ñāṇa*).

A desire to be set free and the knowledge thereof (*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*) will grow out into re-contemplation (*paṭisaṅkhāna-ñāṇa*), that is contemplation of the same three characteristics of transience, suffering and soullessness, but with the increased insight as seen from a higher plane.

Insight of indifference to the activities of this life (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*) will be a natural consequence of this disgust and deeper understanding, where even-mindedness is due not to lack of interest, but to lack of self-interest.

The climax of discernment finally is reached with the insight of adaptation (*anuloma ñāṇa*), which is the gateway to emancipation (*vimokkhamukha*), where the mind is qualified for the Path of holiness.

No morbid asceticism can be the way leading to emancipation, but rather the well-being of a concentrated mind without worry, without agitation, without preoccupation, without craving or clinging to either good or bad. Not even striving in the good sense can procure one this blessed state. For striving is desire; and desire can only arise for something to be attached to. How can there be attachment for what is entirely beyond sensation and mental conception? There can be no desire for Nibbāna and the attainment of Deliverance is not dependent upon striving.¹ Nibbāna is non-conditioned (*asaṅkhata*), non-created, non-caused, non-made (*akata*). And what is non-composed is not decomposable, is permanent (*dhuvā*) and indestructible (*akkhara*).

Like darkness cannot be made, but the light which prevents darkness can be extinguished, so Nibbāna cannot be made, but the passions which prevent it can be eradicated. The three roots of all evil inclinations are greed (*lobha*), hate (*dosa*) and delusion (*moha*). Greed and hate are opposed in character, for greed is desire to get more and hate is desire to get rid of. Thus, though opposed, they are only two forms of desire. And desire is always combined with delusion. We desire for things just because we do not know them, just because we do not realize their impermanent, woeful, soulless nature. We try to grasp the void, because delusion has created a phantom, which like the rainbow finds only existence in ourselves. Trying to grasp that spectre, the rainbow, the horizon, must bring about disillusion, because they have no real existence, but change with the position of the onlooker.

To realize this, is to give up craving for them, by which all suffering also will come to an end. And that is Nibbāna!

In the depth of our hearts we feel that bliss finally depends upon rest, upon changelessness. Even the tendency of the senses to attachment is nothing but the longing after rest in the midst of restlessness. Thus even craving is but an attempt to come to this natural equilibrium. That craving does not succeed in reaching the goal is again due to ignorance. What good can be expected from a thought that was born from a misconception? If the goal is misunderstood, no striving can correct that initial mistake. On the contrary, the greater effort employed the greater also the distance separating in the end.

If peace is sought for, this cannot be obtained by waging war. The only war that can put a stop to all war is the war against self. A war fought against others is a war of selfishness and can never lead to true peace. Like war and peace receive a different meaning dependent on the standpoint of the observer, so life and no-more-becoming obtain their respective values dependent on the point from which they are surveyed. From the worldling's standpoint which is one of craving, life is real, because life is craving; and then from that same standpoint no-more-becoming is seen as unreal, empty, annihilation. But from a viewpoint beyond the world (*lokuttara*) from where the world is viewed as impermanent, sorrow-fraught and soulless, any craving is seen as a vain attempt—and life itself, which is but craving, is seen as empty and unreal, while no-more-becoming is considered as perfect deliverance and highest bliss.

¹ Striving, in the sense of the Fourfold Right Effort, guided by insight and not desire, is however an indispensable part of the Noble Eightfold Path: See also *Bodhi Leaves* No. B. 28 "Escapism and Escape." (Editor, *The Wheel*)

Thus, though the attainment of Nibbāna can rightly be said to be the absolute content—for craving or desire under any form has become impossible—yet it cannot be hankered after (*appaṇihita*). But when all the fetters have been removed, fetters which arose and were maintained in ignorance, fetters which will disappear with ignorance, then that which cannot be hankered after can be realized. “Hard is the infinite to see, truth is no easy thing to see; craving is pierced by him who knows, for him who sees nothing remains.” (Udāna 8.2).

But is Nibbāna then total annihilation?

Even this question is put in ignorance, for there is nothing to be annihilated. Only that which is, can be destroyed. But that which constantly arises, and in arising is nothing but a process of change, and in changing also constantly ceases, that cannot be said to be destroyed; it merely does not arise again. Now it should be well understood, that like arising in a process, similarly cessation is a process, so that even when the process of arising does not occur again, the process of cessation might not have come to stop yet. Hence we obtain a double aspect of Nibbāna.

The first one, the coming to a stop of the process of arising is called “*sa-upādisesa-nibbāna*” i.e. Nibbāna with the remnant of the aggregates of craving. Life being conditioned by craving, the aggregates of life, viz. body and mind, are rightly called the aggregates of craving.

As soon as the process of the arising of craving has come to a stop, the grasping of the aggregates that form an individual will cease also. When the lust for life has ceased, no rebirth will take place further, and the highest state—that of an Arahāt—is attained. But when the lust for life has ceased, life itself will not simultaneously disappear. As the heat in an oven, which is produced by fire, will remain for some time even though that the fire be extinct, so the result of craving which produced rebirth might remain for some time, even though the fire of the passions be extinct. Thus the acts of thought of an Arahāt are neither moral nor immoral. His apperception is ineffective. Though he acts, his actions are not impelled by craving and hence they do not constitute kamma, either good or bad; they consist merely in the function (*kiriya-javana*) and are free from tendencies, likes or dislikes (*anusayā*). But where there arises no new kamma, there no further vipāka can come about.

When, therefore, the result of previous kamma is exhausted, even the remnant of the aggregates of clinging will be broken up, and this is called *an-upādisesa-nibbāna* or *parinibbāna*.

While Nibbāna is single in its nature, yet for the purpose of logical treatment it is thus considered as twofold. By using the two kinds of this logical distinction indiscriminately, endless confusion is caused. When thus Nibbāna is said to be a mental state, this applies only to the state of an Arahāt who has overcome all the mental defilements (*kilesa*) and has broken all the fetters (*saṃyojana*) which bind to rebirth.

Like freedom is only a negative concept, being the absence of restrictions, thus the freedom (*mokkha*) of Nibbāna can only be explained as the absence of defilements and mental fetters. But as those defilements are exactly the roots of all evil, the cause of all suffering, Nibbāna can be called the deliverance from sorrow.

Where Nibbāna cannot be aimed at as a positive goal, for “not by striving can world’s end be reached” (*gamanena na pattaṃ lokass’ anto kudācanaṃ*—AN 4), striving becomes possible in the overcoming of the hindrances and obstacles. Thus Nibbāna remains unconditioned (*asaṅkhata*) and uncreated (*akata*), not to be produced by cumulative virtue, not by purification of a soul, or by cleansing of a soul, or by cleansing of self. There is no “ego” to be made free from selfishness in order to obtain purity, but there is an “ego” to be got rid of, an “ego” misconceived by ignorance and born of craving.

When that “ego” is understood as a delusion, the first fetter (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) is broken and the stream which leads to Nibbāna is entered (*sotāpatti*). Like, while plunging into the water of a river, the land and the attractions thereof must be left behind, so when entering the stream of holiness, together with the delusion of self will also disappear all doubts and attachment to ritualistic performances. But in the stream itself further hindrances might occur, and they too have to be overcome. Antipathy (*vyāpāda*) and sense-pleasures (*kāmacchanda*) might retard the progress of the stream-winner, still causing rebirth, though not in woeful states. Only when even the last five obstacles will have been passed, which are desire for rebirth in form, or formless spheres, (*rūparāga, arūparāga*), conceit (*māna*) which is the final and most subtle stronghold of the dying “self,” agitation (*uddhacca*) and ignorance (*avijjā*), the stream will lose itself in the ocean and the freedom of Nibbāna be attained. As the stream is still hemmed in on both sides by the river banks, so the Path to Nibbāna is beset with difficulties. But it is exactly in the overcoming of those difficulties that the freedom of Nibbāna can be realized. Once more, Nibbāna cannot be aimed at, desired or longed for, just because it is non-conditioned and does not arise dependent on conditions. But one can strive for the extinction of craving, for the abolition of the slavery of an imaginary self, for the overcoming of ignorance. The factors to this enlightenment (*satta sambojjhaṅga*) include the perseverance of mindfulness (*sati*), the open-mindedness of investigation (*dhammavicaya*) with the steadiness of abiding energy (*virīya*), the enthusiasm of spiritual joy (*pīti*) together with the sobriety of tranquility of mind (*passaddhi*), the peacefulness of concentration (*samādhi*) with the harmony of equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Renunciation, not as mortification, but as a natural result of insight through which craving and clinging become impossible, is the way by which deliverance from the passions can be attained. Like a lamp must give up its oil so that its light may shine—similarly renunciation is an indispensable factor to enlightenment: renunciation not only of the world but also of the self, “like the wind the leaves from a tree” (Theragāthā 2). It is only in perfect renunciation that perfect freedom can be found. It is the will-to-live which leads to rebirth; it is thus the will-to-live that must be conquered, so that Nibbāna may be attained.

This lust for life cannot be cut short by violence. An act of violence against oneself may be caused by disgust with life, yet it remains lust for better life. The will-to-live cannot be conquered by will for no-more-life, but by understanding that there is no self to live. The delusion of the craving for existence can be expelled by the realization of non-self. Then not only the will, will be dissolved, but even the possibility of willing.

When thus the insight of non-self (*anattā*) will have taken the place of delusion (*moha*) and ignorance (*avijjā*)—when being will be viewed as a mere process of becoming, and becoming as ceasing—then the spell which kept us bound so long will be broken, the dream state of hallucination will vanish and reality will be realized. This reality is not the “eternalization” of a self or soul, but the escape therefrom. Therefore Nibbāna is not a deliverance of the self, not a salvation of the soul, but the deliverance from the self, the salvation from the soul, i.e. from the misconceived “I.”

Once this deliverance is attained, no more hallucination can occur, because the source which produced this misconception, namely, craving, selfishness, is dried up.

And with this the last word has been said; for, where craving has ceased, the process of becoming, which is grasping has ceased also. Where there is no more becoming, there is no more rebirth and all its consequences of sorrow, decay and death. And thus Nibbāna is the only Deliverance, the only Freedom, surpassing all understanding, above all emotion, beyond all striving, unconditioned, uncreated, indestructible, whereto all may attain through the overcoming of greed, hate and delusion, through insight and realization in the Deliverance from self.

In soundless depth of breathless thought,
A silent music plays;
While all the universe around
In never-ending waves
Unknowingly, unwillingly,
For that same silence craves.
All men and beasts and things alike,
For independence strive;
For freedom from all wants and needs
Which cause their restless drive.
Thus every deed contains the seed
Through which all will arrive
At even-balanced, cravingless,
Birthless and deathless life.
